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THE AMERICAN CHRISTIANS AND THE STATE OF ISRAEL

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**Abstract:** Israel has always mattered to American Christians. They are among the strongest supporters of the State of Israel in the United States. The paper argues that the support that was extended by American Christians in general and the Christian Right in particular, to Israel and the Jewish people is the continuation of a long tradition in conservative American Christians rooted mainly in their theological doctrine. However, the study shows that the Christian Right is ambivalent in its view on Jews. On the one hand, Jews are considered to be God's chosen people and to have a special Biblical status and role. On the other hand, the Christian Right is allegedly anti-Semitic, as it views Jews as a condemned nation for their rejection of Christ as the Messiah, the reason for which they are unsaved and need to be converted to Christianity. Interestingly, both views, love and hatred of Jews, are based on the Biblical teachings and grounded in conservative Protestant theology; their paradoxical views on Jews are not a new phenomenon among conservative American Christians. Nevertheless, the study found that the support of the American Christians of the establishment of the State of Israel goes beyond theological doctrines or values. In fact, the humanitarian considerations of the liberal Christian and secular organizations in particular, were significant in contributing to the establishment of the Jewish state.

**Key Words:** American Christians, Christian Right, Christian Zionism, US-Israel Relations, Conservative Christians Theology, State of Israel, Jews, Millennial beliefs, Anti-Semitism.

## **Introduction**

The unequivocal support of the American Christians for the Israeli State never declined since its inception in 1947 and has remained as strong ever since. In fact, any study will show that the Christians in the United States are largely the strongest supporters of Israel and can pose an even greater influence over US policy towards Israel than the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) or other Jewish lobby groups do, by opposing all American policies which seem to be hostile towards Israel. Another tangible factor that strengthens the US-Israel relationship is the support from the American public, who are Christians at large. A 2006 study by the Pew Research Center (PRC) revealed that for the by then 40 years after the Six Day War of 1967, the American public had shown consistent support to Israel. The opinion surveys of the study indicated that 52% supported Israel compared to only 11% who supported the Palestinians. In a similar survey conducted by PRC immediately after the Gaza War in 2009, the findings remained the same with 49% of Americans supporting Israel.<sup>1</sup> The discussion will be divided into two parts. The first part examines the historical background of the support which, it argues, has been extended by conservative Christians in general and the Christian Right in particular, to Israel and the Jewish people in keeping with the long term tradition in conservative Christian religion. In part two, it seeks to demonstrate that the support of the American Christians of the establishment of the State of Israel was and still is not only confined within conservative Christian theology, but goes beyond that. Factors such as the human rights and humanitarian considerations particularly from the liberal Christian and secular organizations, were significant in contributing to the establishment of the Jewish state. Therefore, the study contends that, in order to better understand the US-Israel “special relationship”, it is worth considering the role of American Christians as another contributing factor that influences US foreign policy towards Israel.

## **The Christian Right and the Israeli State: Theological Belief as a Basis**

The American Christian Right believes that to stand against the Jews is to stand against God. Thus, it should forever show and provide firm support for Israel, as well as defending it from any potential enemy through the American foreign policy. As a matter of belief, conservative Protestants characterized the establishment of the State of Israel as “one of the most striking fulfilments of Biblical prophecy the world has ever seen.”<sup>2</sup> As Rev. Malcolm Hedding, Director of International Christian Embassy Jerusalem (ICEJ) says: “We stand for the right to all land that God

gave under the Abrahamic covenant 4,000 years ago to Israel ... and He will regulate the affairs of how Israel comes into the allotment which is hers forever.”<sup>3</sup> They celebrated the rebirth and the restoration of the Jews in Israel as evidence and justification for their dispensationalist theology and as part of the divine plan for further developments in the apocalyptic process, which will lead to the second coming of Jesus Christ. With one of the main prophecies now in place, dispensationalists contended that they had the “reference point they had been waiting for”, and proof that God kept his promises.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important events after the establishment of the State of Israel was the victory of Israel in the Six Day War in 1967. The capture of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza by Israel has provided more conclusive evidence of the dispensationalist predictions of the creation of a “Greater Israel” as part of the end time events. In addition, the continuous conflicts in the Middle East have strengthened their beliefs in what La Haye perceived as part of “God’s fulfilling His plan” prior to the imminent coming of Jesus to the world for the second time.<sup>5</sup> As a result, those in the Christian Right that prescribed dispensationalist theology became staunch supporters for Israel.<sup>6</sup> This argument is supported by Mayer’s research in 2004 that shows Christian fundamentalists are the most distinctive among Americans in showing their support and sympathy for Israel.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, a 2007 survey shows that 69% of white American evangelicals still believe that “God gave Israel to the Jewish people”, and 59% of them also believe that “Israel is the fulfilment of biblical prophecy”.<sup>8</sup> Besides consistently becoming the strongest supporters of Israel, the Christian Right also opposes any American policies which seem to pressure Israel.<sup>9</sup>

Intriguingly, the Christian Right has offered undivided support for Israel and shown its uncompromised commitment throughout the history of Israel. Martin argues that “[m]ost importantly, and consistently, virtually all segments of the contemporary Christian Right have been staunch supporters of Israel.”<sup>10</sup> This commitment mainly derives from the Old Testament which says: “To stand against the Jews is to stand against God”<sup>11</sup> and God’s message in the Book of Genesis that states: “I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curses thee.”<sup>12</sup> In the AIPAC Policy Conference in March 2007, John Hagee, the founder of Christians United for Israel (CUFI) articulates his organization’s commitment to the cause of Israel. He states that CUFI and the other like-minded evangelicals have “a deep-seated faith-based belief to love Israel, to speak up for Israel, to stand up for Israel, to pray for Israel, and to financially support Israel.”<sup>13</sup>

Another Christian Right’s organization that supports Israel is the Christians’ Israel Public Action Campaign (CIPAC). The organization is a registered Christian lobby in support of Israel and US–Israel relations. Founded in 1989, CIPAC is actively involved in lobbying efforts in Congress on behalf of Israel’s and Jewish interests. According to its official website,

CIPAC was founded based on a biblical belief that God gave Israel to the Jewish people and it is the fulfilment of biblical prophecy.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Christian Right believes that firm support for Israel should be an absolute requirement for American foreign policy, and that America should provide all means necessary for protecting the survival of Israel so that it will be able to serve as the Kingdom of God at the Second Coming of Jesus.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to note that most organizations associated with Christian Zionism are led by Christian Right leaders and therefore it is not surprising when some scholars suggest that the Christian Zionist organizations are also part of Christian Right advocate groups or forces within the Christian Right movement. Sizer notes that, “[w]ith the high profile support of Fundamentalist leaders like Falwell and Robertson ... Christian Zionism [became] synonymous with American Evangelicalism.”<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Durham believes many Christian Right organizations such as the Moral Majority, Christian Friends for Israeli Communities, the American Alliance of Jews and Christians, the Christian Coalition and the Religious Roundtable are also Christian Zionist organizations.<sup>17</sup> Croft also suggests that many conservative Protestant organizations have not only supported but also defended Israel’s interests and become its “valuable friends”.<sup>18</sup> Gary Bauer, an influential leader of the Christian Right notes that he feels “deeply that America has an obligation to stand by Israel,” based “on reading of the Scripture, where evangelicals believe God has promised that Land to the Jewish people.”<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, a prominent Christian Right leader, Jerry Falwell, has repeatedly declared that his support for Israel is his religious duty and he believes that to stand against Israel is to stand against God. According to Ralph Reed, former head of the Christian Coalition and co-founder of Stand for Israel, “Christians have the potential to be the most effective constituency influencing a foreign policy since the end of the Cold War ... They are shifting the center of gravity in the pro-Israel community to become more conservative.”<sup>20</sup> A prominent scholar of American history and religion, George Marsden, notes that, “Although impossible to measure, perhaps evangelicalism’s greatest political impact on American policy during the past fifty years has been its role in broadening the popular base for an almost unreserved support for the state of Israel.”<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, Jean Hardisty, the founder of the Political Research Associates, states that:

Throughout U.S. history, conservative Christians who were evangelical or fundamentalist and have taken the word literally, have believed that the creation of Israel was a necessity for the fulfilment of Christian prophecy... So it’s in the interest of Christians focused on the ultimate accomplishment of the Second Coming of Christ that the Jews go

back to Israel, and this creates a natural affinity with Jews around the issue of Israel.<sup>22</sup>

The millennial biblical belief, for instance, the restoration of the Jews to their “forefather” land in Palestine and the establishment of the state of Israel, was emphasized by the conservative American Protestants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Russell Mead in the *Symposium on Evangelicals and US Foreign Policy 2007* argues that the idea of bringing back the scattered Jews from around the globe to their ancient homeland in Palestine, and subsequently establishing the Israel state for them, was initiated and advocated by the early American Puritans centuries before Theodor Herzl wrote *The Jewish State* in 1896.<sup>23</sup> This support was actually linked directly to the development of Christian theology in Britain. History has demonstrated that all ideas, preaching and activities of the Christian Zionist movement mainly developed in England as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> One of the earliest academic books that studied the development of the millennialism beliefs from England to the United States was *The Roots of Fundamentalism*, written in 1970 by Ernest Sandeen. The book emphasizes how millennialism theology was exported to the US and gained significant acceptance among conservative Protestants.<sup>25</sup> A recent study on a similar subject is a book by Dan Cohn Sherbok that shows the concern for and support of the Christians for the formation of the State of Israel can be traced back to 16<sup>th</sup> century England. Indeed, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were many writings that anticipated and promoted the return of Jews to their ancestral land in Palestine. For example, in 1585 Thomas Brightman, an English theologian, prophesized it in his book entitled *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos*. In 1608 another theologian, Thomas Draxe, published a treatise on the plan of God for the Jewish people who he believed would return to Palestine. Similarly, in 1615, Sir Henry Finch, a jurist and member of the English Parliament, published a few books which encouraged the Jews to claim back their promised land in Palestine.<sup>26</sup> In 1649, a year after most of the European states ratified the Treaty of Westphalia, the English Puritans sent a petition to Oliver Cromwell’s Parliament encouraging the government to send the Jews in England to Palestine. Their petition stated:

With and amongst some of the Izraelle race called Jews, and growing sensible of their heavey out-cryes and clamours against the intolerable cruelty of this our English Nation, exercised against them by that ... inhumane ... massacre ... and their banishment ever since ... that by discourse with them, and serious perusal of the prophets, both they and we find, that the time of her call draweth nigh ... and that this Nation of England, with the inhabitants of the Nether-lands, shall be the first

and readiest to transport Izraells sons and daughters in their ships to the land promised to their fore-fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, for an everlasting inheritance.<sup>27</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the emphasis on the establishment of a state for Jews in their ancient homeland not only came from the writings of English theologians, academics and political leaders, but also from many organized Christian societies and movements which strived in the light of such conviction. Indeed, these organizations contributed significantly to the growth of the Christian Zionism movement. For instance, in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Amongst the Jews and the Anglican London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews worked closely with the Church of Scotland in organizing and supporting a mission to send the Jews in the United Kingdom to Palestine. Likewise, a series of meetings and conferences were organized to discuss the biblical prophecies, the Second Coming of Jesus, the role of the Jews in God's providential plan and the return of Jews to their ancestral land. For instance, the Powerscourt Conferences, which organized a series of such events on the above mentioned subjects, were considered most successful when more than 400 Christian theologians attended.<sup>28</sup>

Parallel to such developments, the British Puritans who migrated and settled in America in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century took along with them the same biblical beliefs about the rights of the Jews over their ancestral land. In 1830, an English Christian theologian, John Thomas, migrated to America and founded "The Christadelphians", an organization located in New York that promoted the restoration of the Jewish nation in Palestine and aimed to provide support to international Jews who intend to migrate to Palestine.<sup>29</sup> In the same year, William Miller (1782–1849) successfully formed a movement in America that propagated the idea of the restoration of the Jews.<sup>30</sup> In his religious-theological essay, *Compendium of Faith*, he notes: "I also found that the promises respecting Israel's restoration are applied by the Apostle to all who are Christ's – the putting on of Christ constituting them Abraham's seed and heirs, according to the promise."<sup>31</sup>

Malachy argues that the wide growth of dispensationalist theology contributed significantly to the growth of Christian Zionism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in America.<sup>32</sup> The early 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of Darby's dispensationalist theology about how "a failing church and revived Israel came to have a profound and increasing influence upon American evangelicalism."<sup>33</sup> During this period, Darby toured America disseminating his interpretation of the biblical prophecy, including the biblical belief in the duty of restoring the Jews to Palestine before the advent of Jesus Christ's second coming. These beliefs and ideas eventually became a major end time belief of the conservative and particularly

evangelical Protestants.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, Darby's dispensationalist theology grew strong and became a mass movement – which influenced millions of conservative Protestants.<sup>35</sup> According to Sizer, besides Darby's dispensationalist theology, there were two other important factors which contributed to the development of the idea of the restoration of Jews to Palestine in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, there was an increasing interest among the conservative Christians in the Holy Land in Palestine. As a result, from 1800 to 1875, more than 2,000 American authors, mainly conservative Protestants, wrote about the significance of the Holy Land in Christianity.<sup>36</sup> Merkley, for example argues that, from the 1840s onwards, “most Americans found it is impossible to think of the Holy Land without also thinking of the Jews and their undoubted future possession of it.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Vogel believes that the influence of Protestantism on American culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has also significantly contributed to the emergence of interest in the Holy Land among Americans. He argues that “the idea of a Holy Land assumed dimensions of a geographic myth that ... played an important role in influencing and directing much of the practical American experience with regard to the actual real place.”<sup>38</sup> Secondly, there was a remarkable increase in the Bible prophecy conferences and movements sponsored by various Bible institutes which mainly propagated Darby's theology. Rausch, who examined the proceedings of these conferences, notes that “one finds abundant support for the restoration of the Jews to the land of Palestine and a basic belief that only the Jewish people has a right to Palestine.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, Weber, who studied the development of Darby's dispensationalist theology, also notes that “[a]lmost without exception the scores of Bible institutes that were founded between 1880–1940 taught dispensationalism.”<sup>40</sup>

William E. Blackstone (1841–1935) was another major figure who contributed to the development of the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. He is, in fact, considered to be the first Christian Zionist lobbyist.<sup>41</sup> He was an evangelical preacher for the Methodist Episcopal Church and became famous for his book entitled *Jesus is Coming*, published in 1878. In his book, he tries to “rejuvenate” Darby's dispensationalist theology by linking the present world events to biblical prophecy. Eventually, through his involvement in the Bible Institute movement and participation in various Bible prophecy conferences, his writings and preaching successfully reached many important conservative Protestant leaders.<sup>42</sup> In addition, he tried to disseminate his ideas through lobbying activities. One of his most significant efforts was to initiate a petition in response to the oppression of the Jews in Russia in 1891. This petition, later known as the “Blackstone Memorial” was sent to President Benjamin in 1891, but it did not successfully convince the president to bring the issue to the international level.<sup>43</sup> However, in Blackstone's biography, he argued that: “Although this effort regarding Palestine was not immediately successful, it had great influence in strengthening the kindly

attitude of the United States toward such proposition.”<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Weber also highlighted the importance of the petition by arguing it was the first formal lobby effort to bring the Jews to Palestine in the American history. He states it came “one year before the first Love of Zion societies were formed in the United States, five years before the publication of Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* (1896), and six years before the first Zionist Congress was convened in Basel.”<sup>45</sup>

In 1916, Blackstone once again submitted a similar petition to President Woodrow Wilson. This effort was made to save the Jews from persecution in Russia and to relocate them in Palestine. Malachy argues this second petition was more effective than the first, as in 1917 President Woodrow Wilson gave his support to the Balfour Declaration.<sup>46</sup> The second memorial also gave significant encouragement to various Protestant denominations and groups in the United States. For example, the Los Angeles Baptist Minister Conference, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Southern California, and the Presbyterian Ministerial Association of Los Angeles were among the groups which adopted Blackstone’s petition and supported the proposal of the restoration of the Jews to Palestine. They proclaimed:

The adoption of the Memorial to the Honourable Woodrow Wilson, President of the U.S., commending the Memorial aforesaid and the objects therein prayed and such measures as may be deemed wise and best for the relief of the Jews and their objects and claims to Palestine as their home.<sup>47</sup>

The 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed massive changes in conservative Protestantism due to various factors, such as the rise of higher criticism on the inerrancy of the Bible. Furthermore, the emergence of modernism and the massive influx of non-Protestant immigrants into America resulted in a split among American conservative Protestants.<sup>48</sup> However, the crisis, as argued by Weber, did not break the dispensationalist belief, especially among conservative Protestants.<sup>49</sup> In contrast, Boyer argued that, as fundamentalism became marginalized in America, dispensationalist theology and biblical prophecy also waned greatly among the American conservative Protestants.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, between the 1930s and 1940s, the idea and commitment to restore the Jews to Palestine by dispensationalist Christians such as William Blackstone was still active. During that period, as anti-Semitism was growing in and around the Western world, it also jeopardized the activities of American conservative Protestants to support the restoration of Jews to the Holy Land.<sup>51</sup> The next topic illustrates the ambivalent stance of conservative Christians towards the anti-Semitism issue.



## Christian Right and Anti-Semitism

Many studies have shown that conservative Christians' beliefs are causally related to anti-Semitism and have found that conservative adherents are more likely to hold anti-Semitic beliefs compared to liberal Christians. The studies argue that millennial dispensationalists were originally divided on their view towards Jews. Some of them believed that because Jews rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah they were cursed and punished by God. Therefore, the persecution of Jews or any act of injustice against Jews in history were part of God's punishment and part of God's plan for the end time. This belief was later developed as a basis for anti-Semitism. Some studies of the Nazi's anti-Semitism during Hitler's reign argue that anti-Semitism was a permanent feature of Christian civilization. They suggest that the Jews' persecution in Nazi Germany was a "reproduction" of traditional Christian anti-Semitism and it was a natural element in the history of Christian tradition. Therefore, the studies contend that, although conservative Christians condemn anti-Semitism, at the same time they believe that all the hatred and violence towards Jews is part of a Biblical prophecy and God's plan for the Second Coming of Jesus. In addition, while they perceive the State of Israel to be protected by God, the future destiny of the Jews is uncertain. They expect only a small group of Jews who have converted to Christianity will be saved as the majority of them who join the anti-Christ force will be exterminated during the battle of Armageddon.<sup>52</sup> As a result, conservative Christians perceive that anti-Semitism and acts of violence towards Jews are part of the signs of end time. They claim that the persecution of the Jews was a form of God's punishment upon the Jews for their apostasy and for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. This idea developed a belief that the unjust acts towards the Jews were an ordained wrath of God.<sup>53</sup>

Smith argues that, in the 1930s, many of the anti-Semitic supporters in the United States were led by conservative Christian leaders.<sup>54</sup> One prominent American conservative Christian evangelist leader who supported the anti-Semitic movement, especially the German Nazis, was Gerald B. Winrod (died 1957). He was a dispensationalist theologian who co-founded *The Defender*, a monthly magazine that was started in 1925 and reached approximately 110,000 subscribers.<sup>55</sup> Winrod also was an important figure for the World Christian Fundamentalist Association. As a dispensationalist, Winrod viewed the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis as a part of the dispensational process and "a great incentive" for Jews to return to Palestine. He also believed that the Jews were living in a "delusion" due to their sin of being the "Christ-killer". Winrod accused the Jews of being the conspirators and culprits behind the collapse of world economics, the decline of moral standards, the corruption in politics and the growth of atheism. Furthermore, he blamed them for causing World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution and the Great Depression in the United

States. He stated that: “behind the scenes there is a hidden hand; a small group of super-intelligent Jews who control the gold of the world and pull wires for the deliberate purpose of tearing down the Gentile peoples.”<sup>56</sup>

In response to the anti-Semitism during Hitler’s reign, some early American dispensationalist periodicals discussed the persecution of Germany’s Jews in the context of the fulfilment of the biblical prophecies. Among others, the periodicals consistently referred to the Jews as still being “God’s Chosen People” but the persecution was God’s plan that would consequently force Jews to return to Palestine. One of the key figures who represented this idea was Louis Sylvester Bauman (1875–1950). He wrote two books, *Light on Bible Prophecy* (1940) and *Russian Events in the Light of Prophecy* (1942). Though Bauman believed that the persecution of Jews in Germany was the key event to fulfil the Bible’s prophecy of the Second Coming, as described in the *Scotfield Reference Bible*, he blamed the “apostate” Jews for bringing about anti-Semitism. He believed that anti-Semitism was not merely anti-Jewish; it was anti-Christ at its core. Furthermore, Bauman gave great attention to what was happening to the Jews in Germany and believed that the persecution of the Jews, anti-Semitic activities, and the return of the Jews to Palestine were “signs” of the end of the age heralding the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>57</sup>

### **Liberal Christians and Their Support for the Creation of an Israeli State**

It is important to note that the interest to protect the rights of Jews to migrate to Palestine also largely came from the liberal or humanitarian Christians. In May 1939, fifty religious leaders from various denominations of liberal Christians, together with the Federal Council of Churches, the American Friends Service Committee and the Pro-Palestine Federation, presented a petition to Congress urging the president and congressmen to adopt legislation that supported the migration of German Jews to Jerusalem. Two congressmen, Sen. Robert F. Wagner (D- N.Y.) and Rep. Edith Rogers (R- Mass.) took the initiative to sponsor a bill known as the Wagner-Rogers Bill that would authorize the admission of 20,000 children from Germany or German-controlled areas over a two-year period. However, the proposal found lukewarm support from the Roosevelt administration and Congress rejected the bill. Despite that, Christian humanitarian churches continued to support Jewish refugees. Due to this effort, it is estimated that between 1933 and 1945, the churches sponsored and aided more than 250,000 Jews to seek refuge in the US.<sup>58</sup>

In 1942, the Christian Council on Palestine (CCP) was established to help the suffering Jews and advocate the right of the Jews to establish their own state. The CCP consisted entirely of liberal Christians with its members numbering around 2,400 in 1944; it took the position that Christians had a responsibility to help the suffering Jews from being

racially discriminated against and religiously persecuted. In other words, they believed that solving the problems of the Jews were a matter of concern to the conscience of Christianity.<sup>59</sup> One of the famous CCP advocates was Reinhold Niebuhr, who served on the executive committee. Niebuhr, who was known as a liberal Protestant theologian, was among the leading advocates for the settlement of Jews in Jerusalem and the establishment of a Jewish state. He wrote: "I belong to a Christian group in this country who believe that the Jews have a right to a homeland. They are a nation, scattered among the nations of the world. They have no place where they are not exposed to the perils of minority status."<sup>60</sup> Niebuhr, who advocated a "Christian realism", supported the right of the Jews to return to Palestine; this view was not based on biblical prophecy, but on the idea that the establishment of a Jewish state was a justice for the Jewish people. However, he also cautioned Zionists not to harbour any unjust thoughts towards the Arab population.<sup>61</sup> In April 1944, Niebuhr wrote: "The homeless Jews must find a home; and Christians owe their Jewish brethren something more than verbal sympathy as they face the most tragic plight which has ever faced a people."<sup>62</sup> In 1946, in order to maximize effectiveness, the American Palestine Committee (APC) and the Christian Council on Palestine (CCP) merged to form the American Christian Palestine Committee (ACPC). With strong support from numbers of prominent public figures, politicians and a membership of over 15,000 Christians, ACPC, a new liberal Christian front, continued the effort to arouse general public support and the political support of statesmen for the Zionist cause and to help Jews immigrate to Palestine.<sup>63</sup> By utilizing various means, such as radio, press, magazines, lectures, sermons and conferences, ACPC successfully exploited the sentiments of anti-Semites as a tool to gain sympathy and support from American politicians and the general public. The ACPC conducted a series of lobbies at Congress. Through Sen. Robert F. Wagner and Sen. Robert A. Taft, many resolutions that urged the US government to facilitate the migration of Jews into Palestine, as well as to pave the way for a democratic Jewish commonwealth, were passed throughout 1945 to 1947. For instance, in July 1945, the ACPC sent a letter to the White House urging the president to convince the British government to "open forthwith the doors of Palestine to unrestricted Jewish immigration and colonization." The letter was signed by 54 senators and 251 representatives of the House.<sup>64</sup>

The ACPC also published a monthly magazine, *Land Reborn*, which focused on communicating the justice for the Jewish people and ran updates on the new developments concerning the establishment of the Jewish state. In addition, the ACPC provided speakers to churches, synagogues, schools and civic groups that informed about the justice of Zionist movement and the persecution of the Jews in Europe. Frequent rallies and conferences were held to attract public support and to strengthen sympathy among the Christian community.<sup>65</sup>

It is worth noting that there were studies which show that the quick *de facto* recognition by the United States of the declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948 was partly because of the good relationship between President Henry Truman and the Zionist leaders as well as his Protestant upbringing. Merkley notes that, after Israel was declared and had the support of the United States, Truman claimed “I am Cyrus”.<sup>66</sup> Recent studies by scholars of diplomatic and Middle Eastern history have shown that Truman’s Protestant heritage was influential.<sup>67</sup> Anderson also notes in his study that “[t]he Zionist lobby and Truman’s advisor won out over States and Defense, but it appears that Truman’s biblical background at least predisposed him to favor prompt recognitions.”<sup>68</sup> However, Benson argues that Clark Clifford, Truman’s domestic advisor, claims that Truman’s decision was based on various factors, such as the strategic, moral, ethical, humanitarian and domestic politics of the US.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, Clifford also included Truman’s religious conviction as part of his reasoning. He states that from Truman’s “reading of the Old Testament he felt the Jews derived a legitimate historical right to Palestine.”<sup>70</sup> Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that Truman’s prompt decision to recognize Israel was mainly because of a very objective reason.<sup>71</sup> It was the best way to minimize the Soviet Union’s influence in Middle Eastern politics and to contain the rise of Arab nationalism. These factors superseded other factors, such as the lobby of the powerful allies of Zionists and Christians in America.<sup>72</sup> In addition, consideration for gaining Jewish votes for Truman’s 1948 presidential election was another major reason. Pogue notes: “At times, because of the necessity emphasized by the White House advisors of winning the fall election, the White House became in effect the foreign office of the State of Israel.”<sup>73</sup>

However, it is also important to note that Truman was not the only American president who supported the Jews and the State of Israel. Based on the historical facts, most of the support for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine was not motivated by biblical beliefs but was due to political, humanitarian and juridical considerations.<sup>74</sup> This was evident in President John Adams’s endorsement of the restoration of the Jews in Palestine. In 1818, President John Adams declared his conviction of the right of the Jews to return to the Holy Land was not based on any religious beliefs but was merely a secular point of view. He said:

I really wish the Jews again in Judea, an independent Nation, for, as I believe, the most enlightened men of it have participated in the amelioration of the philosophy of the age; once restored to an independent government, and no longer persecuted, they would soon wear away some of its asperities and peculiarities of their character. I wish your nation may be admitted to all the privileges of citizens in every part of the world.

This country [the United States] has done much; I wish it may do more, and annul every narrow idea in religion, government and commerce.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusions

In sum, the support of the Christian Right for the Jewish people and the creation of the Israeli state is not a recent phenomenon. The support has not only come from the American conservative Christian such as the Christian Right, but also from among liberal Christians. In contrast to the Christian Right, who were largely motivated by theological convictions, liberal Christians' support was based on humanitarian and political motivations. In other words, the support of Christians of the establishment of the State of Israel went beyond theological narrative or value. In fact, the humanitarian considerations, particularly from the liberal Christian and secular organizations, were significant in contributing to the establishment of the Jewish state. The study suggests that, in order to better understand the US-Israel "special relationship", it is worth considering the role of American Christians as another contributing factor that influences current US foreign policy towards Israel. Similarly, the initiatives should be taken to understand or integrate American Christians religious beliefs and their dynamic political activism of both the Christian Right movement and Liberal Christians as instrumental in shaping and influencing US foreign policy towards Israel.

## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, from 7-11<sup>th</sup> January 2009. Available at <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1076/> Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2009

<sup>2</sup> Yona Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel* (Jerusalem: The Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1978), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Lampman, "Mixing Prophecy and Politics," *The Christian Science Monitor*, <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0707/p15s01-lire.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 204.

<sup>5</sup> In Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1993), 230.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Hassan S. Haddad, "Christian Zionism in America: The Religious Factor in American Middle East Policy," in *American Church Politics and the Middle East*, ed. Basheer K. Nijim (Belmont, MA: AAUG, 1982), and Jon Krosnick and Shibley Telhami, "Public Attitudes toward Israel: A Study of the Attentive and Issue Publics," *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (1995).

<sup>7</sup> Jeremy D. Mayer, "Christian Fundamentalists and Public Opinion Towards the Middle East: Israel's New Best Friends?," *Social Science Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Robert Ruby, "A Six-Day War: Its Aftermath in American Public Opinion," <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=218>.

<sup>9</sup> Mayer, "Christian Fundamentalists and Public Opinion Towards the Middle East: Israel's New Best Friends?."

<sup>10</sup> William Martin, "The Christian Right and American Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* Spring, no. 114 (1999), 66.

<sup>11</sup> Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right*, 231.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 12:3

<sup>13</sup> John Hagee, "Speech to Aipac Policy 2007," AIPAC, <http://www.aipac.org/publications/speechesByPolicymaker/Hagee-PC-2007.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> "Welcome to Cipac: The Complete Pro-Israel Lobby," Christians' Israel Public Action Campaign (CIPAC), <http://www.cipaonline.org>.

<sup>15</sup> Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right*, 230-231.

<sup>16</sup> Stephan Sizer, *Christian Zionism: A Road to Armageddon?* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 93.

<sup>17</sup> Martin Durham, "Evangelical Protestantism and Foreign Policy in the United States after September 11," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38, no. 2 (2004), 150-152.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart Croft, "'Thy Will Be Done': The New Foreign Policy of America's Christian Right," *International Politics*, no. 44 (2007), 705.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Fred Strickert, "The Christian Right and Support for Israel," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 21, no. Sept-Oct (2002), 82.

<sup>20</sup> Allan C. Brownfeld, "Strange Bedfellows: The Jewish Establishment and the Christian Right," (Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, 2002), quoted in Mayer, "Christian Fundamentalists and Public Opinion Towards the Middle East: Israel's New Best Friends?," 695.

<sup>21</sup> George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, ed. (Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 77.

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Esther Kaplan, *With God on Their Side: George W. Bush and the Christian Right* (New York: New Press, 2005), 27.

<sup>23</sup> See William Martin, Walter Russell Mead, and Leo R. Ribuffo, "Symposium on Evangelicals and Us Foreign Policy [Rush Transcript]," Council on Foreign Relations, [http://www.cfr.org/publication/1491/symposium\\_on\\_evangelicals\\_and\\_us\\_foreign\\_policy\\_session](http://www.cfr.org/publication/1491/symposium_on_evangelicals_and_us_foreign_policy_session).

<sup>24</sup> See Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 2006). Also Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*.

<sup>25</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

<sup>26</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism*, 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism*, 9-11.

<sup>29</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism*, 3-8.

<sup>30</sup> Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*, 10-11.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*, 23.

<sup>32</sup> Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*. Generally, the term 'Zionism' is defined as "the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the assumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel," which has advocated, "from its inception, tangible as well as spiritual aims." Whereas the term 'Christian Zionism' refers to "a movement within Protestant fundamentalism that understands the modern state of the country-region Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and thus deserving of political, financial, and religious support." There is a distinctive difference between Christian Zionism and Zionism movement. The former is a movement which emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was established by the secular intellectual Jews in Europe out of the ferment of nationalist idea; whereas the latter came into existence due to the dispensationalists' apocalyptic biblical beliefs. See Donald Wagner, "Defining Christian Zionism," <http://www.christianzionism.org/Article/Wagner02.asp>.

<sup>33</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism: A Road to Armageddon?*, 66.

<sup>34</sup> Don Wagner, "For Zion's Sake," *Middle East Report*, no. 223 (Summer 2002): 54.

<sup>35</sup> Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Towards Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Publishing House, 1991), 25.

<sup>36</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism: A Road to Armageddon?*, 32-33.

<sup>37</sup> Paul Merkley, *Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948* (London: Franks Cass, 1998), 57.

<sup>38</sup> Lester Irvin Vorgel, *To See a Promised Land: Americans and the Holy Land in the Nineteenth Century* (Penn: Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), xv.

<sup>39</sup> David Rausch, *Zionism within the Early American Fundamentalism, 1878-1918: A Convergence of Two Institutions* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1979), 193-194.

<sup>40</sup> Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Michigan: Baker Academics, 2004), 35.

<sup>41</sup> Wagner, "For Zion's Sake", 54.

<sup>42</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism: A Road to Armageddon?*, 71.

<sup>43</sup> Lawrence J. Epstein, *Zion's Call: Christian Contributions to the Origins and Development of Israel* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), 110.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*, 138.

<sup>45</sup> Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend*, 104.

<sup>46</sup> Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*, 139.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*, 139.

<sup>48</sup> See Walter Russell Mead, "God's Country?," *Foreign Affairs*, 85, no. 5 (2006).

<sup>49</sup> Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism*, 177.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (New York: Harvard University Press, 1992), 104.

<sup>51</sup> Sizer, *Christian Zionism: A Road to Armageddon?*, 81.

<sup>52</sup> See Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, "Do Christian Beliefs Cause Anti-Semitism - a Comment," *American Sociological Review* 38 (1973), John Cager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Towards Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Helen Fein, ed., *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Context of Modern Antisemitism* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1987), David A. Gerber, ed., *Anti-Semitism in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

<sup>53</sup> See Glock and Stark, *Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism*, Glock and Stark, "Do Christian Beliefs Cause Anti-Semitism - a Comment", Gerber, ed., *Anti-Semitism in American History*, Fein, ed., *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Context of Modern Antisemitism*.

<sup>54</sup> Tom W. Smith, "The Religious Right and Anti-Semitism," *Review of Religious Research*, 40, no. 3 (1999): 244.

<sup>55</sup> Leo R. Rebuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 121.

<sup>56</sup> Gerald B. Winrod, *The Hidden Hand: The Protocol and the Coming Superman* (Wichita: Defender Publisher, 1933), in James A. Saddington, "Prophecy and Politics: A History of Christian Zionism in the Anglo-American Experience, 1800-1948" (Bowling Green State University, 1996), 312.

<sup>57</sup> Louis S. Bauman, "Why I Believe the Second Coming Is Imminent," *The Brethren Evangelist*, 25 April 1936, in Saddington, "Prophecy and Politics: A History of Christian Zionism in the Anglo-American Experience, 1800-1948", 294.

<sup>58</sup> Henry L. Feingold, *Bearing Witness: How America and Its Jews Responded to the Holocaust* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 231-232.

<sup>59</sup> Caitlin Carenen, "The American Christian Palestine Committee, the Holocaust, and Mainstream Protestant Zionism (1938-1948)", *Holocaust Genocide Studies*, 24, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>60</sup> Shalom Goldman, "The Christian Roots of Zionism," *Religion Dispatches*, [http://www.religiondispatches.org/archieve/rdbook/2171.excerpt:\\_the\\_christian\\_roots\\_of\\_zionism](http://www.religiondispatches.org/archieve/rdbook/2171.excerpt:_the_christian_roots_of_zionism).

<sup>61</sup> Egal Feldman, "Reinhold Niebuhr and the Jews," *Jewish Social Studies*, 46, no. 3/4 (1984), 293-302.

<sup>62</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "Editorial Notes," *Christianity and Crisis*, (3 April 1944).

<sup>63</sup> Carl Vos, *The American Christian Palestine Committee: Essays in American Zionism 1917-1948* (New York: Herzl Press, 1978), 486. See also Carenen, "The American Christian Palestine Committee, the Holocaust, and Mainstream Protestant Zionism (1938-1948)".

<sup>64</sup> Saddington, "Prophecy and Politics: A History of Christian Zionism in the Anglo-American Experience, 1800-1948", 383.

<sup>65</sup> Saddington, "Prophecy and Politics: A History of Christian Zionism in the Anglo-American Experience, 1800-1948", 381-382.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 21-22. Cyrus was a Persian Emperor who supported the return of the Jews to Israel after they had been in captivity in Persia in the Old Testament, Biblical prophecy had declared that a Gentile leader would act as a "Cyrus" in the restoration of the Jews to Israel.



<sup>67</sup> Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 23.

<sup>68</sup> Irvine H. Anderson, *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy: The Promised Land, America, and Israel, 1917-2002* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), 75.

<sup>69</sup> Michael T. Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (Praeger: Westport, 1997).

<sup>70</sup> Clark Clifford, *Counsel to the President: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991), 8.

<sup>71</sup> George Marshall, the Secretary of State during the Truman administration, was reportedly opposed to Truman's decision to recognize Israel as he believed it would jeopardize US strategic and economic interest in the Middle East. See details in John Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1974 ).

<sup>72</sup> See Leo Ribuffo, "Religion and American Foreign Policy : The Story of a Complex Relationship," *National Interest*, no. 52 (Summer 1998).

<sup>73</sup> Snetsinger, *Truman, the Jewish Vote, and the Creation of Israel*, 374-375. There were numerous records of extensive Zionist lobbying prior to Truman's recognition of Israel. However, the level of effectiveness of that lobby is not clear. For instance, there was a report that Truman was very annoyed with the lobby and was said to have shouted in one meeting in 1946: "The [the Zionist Lobby] somehow expect me to fulfil all the prophecies of the prophets. I tell them sometimes that I can no more fulfil all the prophecies of Ezekiel than I can that other great Jew, Karl Marx." See details in Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, 91.

<sup>74</sup> See Malachy, *American Fundamentalism and Israel: The Relation of Fundamentalist Churches to Zionism and the State of Israel*.

<sup>75</sup> In Peter Johnson, "Mainline Churches and United States Middle East Policy," in *American Church Politics and the Middle East*, ed. Basheer K. Nijim (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-America University Graduates, 1982), 68.

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