

Christian Zionism: Revisiting My Doctoral Dissertation

I was invited to give a lecture in September on the following topic: Positions on the State of Israel in the context of eschatological decisions. One reason for inviting me must have been [my doctoral thesis](#) from 2007 on a similar topic: Christian Zionism in the Federal Republic of Germany.¹

That was a while ago. I have therefore taken the invitation as an opportunity to review recent research on the subject of Christian Zionism, not only in the Federal Republic of Germany. What in my work has proven itself and has been confirmed? What would have to be supplemented or even corrected?

I started the lecture with [a picture](#) and the question: Who, where, when?

It's a photo of Michelle Bolsonaro, October 2022, voting for the presidential elections in Brazil. Her husband will lose the election by a narrow margin.

„May the blessings of our God be upon Brazil and Israel. God, homeland, family and freedom,“ said Michelle in the Instagram post. (The New Arab Staff: 2022)

I will come back to this picture.

I will present three points that I feel have been confirmed, and then propose three important additions.

Of course, there are positions on the State of Israel that do not regard it as a theological entity and are neutral or even critical of it. Of course, this is also associated with an eschatological decision, for instance, that we do not know how God will fulfil his prophetic promise to biblical Israel (is the State of Israel really this fulfilment?) or that we find the ethical message of the prophets more important (an action or a policy that fulfils prophecy is not justified by it). Often, questions of justice then take on the leading role.

And, of course, it is possible to be pro-Israel without taking sides too one-sidedly. In Germany, precisely such an attitude is widespread in the pietistic-evangelical circles associated with the Evangelical Alliance (EA). On them, I wrote:

Overall, it can be said that large parts of the evangelical movement are determined by a pro-Israel attitude that can best be described with the term *solidarity with Israel*. The decisive factors are the expectation of restoration [of Israel] and premillennialism. The dogmatic and ideological militancy that characterizes Christian Zionism is by no means always evident. Often representatives strive for moderation, balance and equilibrium, and want to avoid one-sidedness or partisanship, even if this does not always succeed. (Hornstra 2010: 41)

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I suspect that most official bodies today would position themselves in a similarly cautious manner. But that is a different topic.

So, first of all, what has been confirmed?

1. Distinction: Restoration, Christian Zionism, Dispensationalism

In my opinion, this distinction is of fundamental importance: that between belief in the restoration of Israel, somehow, as a people, as a country, whether before or after the conversion to the Christian Messiah, which is also expected, on the one hand, and on the other hand, Christian Zionism. The first is pure expectation, often passive. *Restorationism* developed after the Reformation. Old Testament prophecies and promises were taken literally, especially by the Puritans in England and later also by the Pietists in Germany ([Lewis 2021](#): 85). This at least created the possibility of perceiving Jews and Judaism more positively. An eschatological decision that also made a country of Israel conceivable again. (A similar idea also existed in the Middle Ages, albeit mainly among marginalized groups. In 16th-century English Protestantism, something new developed, independent from these older versions.)

However, Restorationists remained largely passive. They may have started a mission to the Jews, but – most of the time – nothing more. This remained the case in Germany until long after the Second World War – but not only there.

Timo Stewart (2014) describes a similar situation in Finland from 1947 to 1949. Many were enthusiastic about the fulfilment of prophecy, but no one advertised that something should be done to help this new state.

Christian Zionism, on the other hand, takes action. It has a practical and an ideological component. Support for the State of Israel is active, concrete, not just mental (see also [Smith 2013](#): 27).

One book that deserves special mention is Donald Lewis (2021; actually, an extension publication on the origin of the movement 2010), [A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century](#). The title is not quite right. The book is not short. And a substantial part deals with the idea of restoration, which Lewis himself distinguishes from Christian Zionism and dispensationalism (ibid.: 2-4, 8; even if he is not always consistent). Christian Zionism is understood by Lewis as a movement that develops from the idea of restoration, something I absolutely agree with.

Too often, Restorationism and Christian Zionism are still equated or confused. In addition, they are also connected or even equated with dispensationalism, as if dispensationalism and its popular theological offshoots had given rise to Christian Zionism.

Dispensationalism has indeed adopted the restoration of Israel in its end-time scenario, but belief in a restoration of Israel towards the end of time does not have to be dispensationalism.

In fact, strictly speaking, Christian Zionism and classical dispensationalism are at odds with each other (e.g. [Smith 2013](#): 159f); God's plan for and with Israel should only restart after the rapture, and therefore there is nothing to support before that. Early dispensationalism was certainly not Christian Zionist.

2. Source: End Times or ...?

The distinction between a movement of Christian Zionism and an expectation of restoration helps us to understand the origin of the movement and the motivation of its followers.

Some critics of Christian Zionism like to portray it as Armageddon theology. Titles like [Anxious for Armageddon](#) (Wagner 1995) and [Christian Zionism: Road-Map to Armageddon?](#) (Sizer 2021) do that. Both are evangelical authors. As they see it, a longing for the end of the world inspires the movement. The eschatological decision would then be primary and all-determining.

[Matthew Westbrook wrote a doctoral thesis on the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem \(ICEJ\)](#) in 2014. The entire second chapter of his dissertation deals with this question, a long chapter. He draws a similar conclusion as I did about

the connection made by the majority of historians and scholars of religion between Christian Zionism and the 19th-20th century theological movement known as „dispensational premillennialism,“ a connection which is ubiquitous in the scholarly literature but deeply problematic. I will argue that this connection is misleading as to both the beginnings of „Christian Zionism“ and its various present manifestations. (Westbrook 2014: 36; cf. Phillips 2014)

Faydra Shapiro, an Orthodox Jew of American origin, writes:

In my research it became clear very quickly that the connection between premillennial dispensationalism and Christian Zionism has been vastly overdrawn. Overwhelmingly my informants either did not consider themselves dispensationalists or – more often – did not know what it or premillennialism meant. The International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ), for example, has repudiated dispensationalism’s teachings and officially distanced itself from dispensationalism. ([Shapiro 2015](#): 12)

And Stephen Spector, an American Jew, notes:

Many commentators have argued, moreover, that these religious convictions helped define U.S. foreign policy under George W. Bush. I was prepared to discover that influence too. I found instead an unexpected pragmatism, flexibility, and nuance in evangelicals ... I also found a lot of disagreement and uncertainty about the end of days. ([Spector 2009](#): viii)

The claim that all Christian Zionists adamantly demand that Israel keep every inch of its biblical territory is vastly overstated. So is the charge that they are yearning for the Jews to convert or die at the end of time ... And many of the most prominent evangelical supporters of Israel, despite their uncompromising public declarations, acknowledge that they will respect the right of the democratically elected Israeli government to give up land in the hope of gaining peace.

Many born-again Christians have only a very vague notion of Israel’s role in the final days, and even among evangelical elites there is remarkable diversity and nuance in their beliefs. That, in turn, allows flexibility about the principle of land-for peace [sic]. Indeed, though it flies in the face of the common stereotype, 52% of evangelical leaders are in favor of a Palestinian state on land that God promised to Abraham, as long as it doesn’t threaten Israel! ([Ibid.](#): 161, based on Todd Hertz, „The Evangelical View of Israel?“ *Christianity Today*, June 11, 2003; this surprises me a little less because it concerns evangelical leaders in general)

And then Spector writes something important:

For very many born-again Christians, the chief biblical imperative to bless Israel is God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, which promises a reward for those who bless the Jews and punishment for those who curse them ... This verse is by far the most prominent reason

that evangelicals cite for their backing of the state of Israel. Every evangelical Zionist I spoke with, leaders and laity alike, from Jerusalem to Washington, D.C., to Midland, Texas, alluded to this promise of blessing for those who bless Israel. ([Ibid.](#): 22; we will come back to this)

Admittedly, the end-time reflexes run deep. With Covid and the Russian war against Ukraine, I was asked, by friends from whom I did not expect this, is this a sign of the end times? Is this Gog from Magog against Israel? As if the Ukraine war is about Israel.

End-time fever. Is that how the enthusiasm for Israel can be explained? Sometimes yes because there is an apocalyptic form of this movement; I don't deny this. But it is not the only form.

By the way, especially in this apocalyptic form, one has to wonder if it is really about Jews or Israelis as human beings. Robert Smith quotes Gershom Gorenberg:

Jews as actors in a Christian drama leading toward the end of days ... real Zionism, as a Jewish movement, is a movement aimed at taking Jews out of the mythological realm and making them into normal actors in history, controlling their fate and acting for pragmatic reasons connected to the here and now. So what's called Christian Zionism is actually very distant from Zionism. ([Smith 2013](#): 24)

Faydra Shapiro goes a little further:

what Jews are for Christian Zionists is exceptional. Jews are not just people. They are fraught with significance, and the Jewishness [not their humanity] is the most important thing about them. ([Shapiro 2015](#): 98)

But at the same time, end-time fever is not the whole story. There are different paths that lead to support and enthusiasm for Israel. The motivations are more complex and diverse than an end-time reflex.

For many, Israel is becoming the key to understanding world affairs. One sees oneself actively involved in God's plan for the world, in the history of salvation, in its completion – this is also eschatology, but different.

Or Israel becomes the key to one's own personal or national identity, the latter especially in American Christian Zionism ([Smith 2013](#): 27; [Durbin 2019](#)).

A deep concern about the history of Jewish-Christian relations often plays an important role, not only in Germany.

An encounter with Israel and Jews, including with the Jewish state, is also important. Such an encounter can be very emotional.

One can certainly speak of love for the Jewish people and for Israel. It may be criticized that Israel and Judaism are thus being co-opted for Christian purposes. In my opinion, however, this does not take away the fact that at the same time, a deeply felt love can play a significant role.

Aron Engberg (2014: 33-60) describes the case of a Swedish Christian whose first visit to Israel sparked a passionate „love at first sight“. This was the „reason for his decision to quit his job in Sweden, his return to Israel, and his subsequent determination to join the IDF [Israeli Defense Force]“ (ibid.: 48). He served in the Israeli army. Engbert identifies love „as the central element motivating his personal engagement with Israel“ (ibid.).

This love can lead to a „second nationalism“. People find a part of their identity and that of their group or nation in Israel. Think back to Michelle Bolsonaro.

Recent research confirms this broader view of what moves the movement, especially this second or double nationalism.

One's own national identity can also be defined in part by this other nation. [Robert Smith \(2013\)](#) describes the identity formation of Great Britain and America as based on *exceptionalism*, belief in the special vocation of the two nations, especially with regard to Israel, for America to this day.

[Matthew Westbrook](#) (2014: 177ff) uses the term *ethnonationalism* for this in his dissertation on the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (it is the topic in chapter 6 of his thesis; more on this later). But it is a very specific form of ethnonationalism: the ethnicity is not one's own but still serves the vision for one's own nation or state.

In such cases, eschatology is not absent, but it is not the determining factor and is not necessarily fixated on Armageddon.

3. A New Form: „Renewalist“

My evaluation of popular theological literature on the topics of the end times and Israel clearly showed that in Charismatic-Pentecostal (especially neo-Pentecostal) circles, Christian Zionism has taken on its own features and differs significantly. It forms its own type. These features include:

- Parallel restoration of Israel and the church, e.g.: the beginning of Zionism (late 19th century) or the Balfour Declaration (1917) and the beginning of Pentecostalism (1906); the revival of the Hebrew language and the reappearance of glossolalia; the conquest of Jerusalem in 1967 and the beginning of the Messianic Jewish movement and the Jesus movement, as well as the breakthrough of the Charismatic movement in the traditional churches.
- Importance and influence of Messianic Jews.
- The adoption of Jewish customs, artifacts, and festivals.
- The *One New Man* made from Jews and Gentiles, an idea based on Ephesians 2:15. This did not happen in the past, on the cross, but is happening now, when Jews and Gentile Christians come together, which is therefore of great importance in the history of salvation. Jews and Christians are brothers and sisters; they are one.
- A unique role of Israel, e.g. *the Greater Riches World Revival* (Finto 2001: 38).
- Many additional positive and optimistic elements in its end-time expectation.

This all sounds very eschatological. But I repeat: it is not the eschatology of end-time scenarios as we know it from dispensationalism and end-time books, which tend to be pessimistic about this world.

This turbo eschatology also acknowledges dark sides; the future is not only golden. But it loses itself above all in the exuberant. Israel, Messianic Jews, and the Christians who support them are playing the leading role in the last days.

I mentioned the PhD thesis of [Matthew Westbrook \(2014\)](#). The existence of such a variation with ethnonationalism as an essential feature is his main thesis. He refers to them as „Renewalist Christian Zionism“.

Yet another new study by [Daniel Hummel \(2017\)](#) agrees; he speaks of „the new Christian Zionism“. This type is international and strongly Pentecostal and less determined by end-time issues. (It is not to be confused with the „new Christian Zionism“ in [McDermott 2016](#), a comparatively moderate position on Israel, but by no means new; McDermott 2016: 15, 46-8, 319.)

So far so good. But what did I miss? What new insights related to Christian Zionism have been produced by scholarship over the past 16 years? In what follows, I discuss new developments in scholarship.

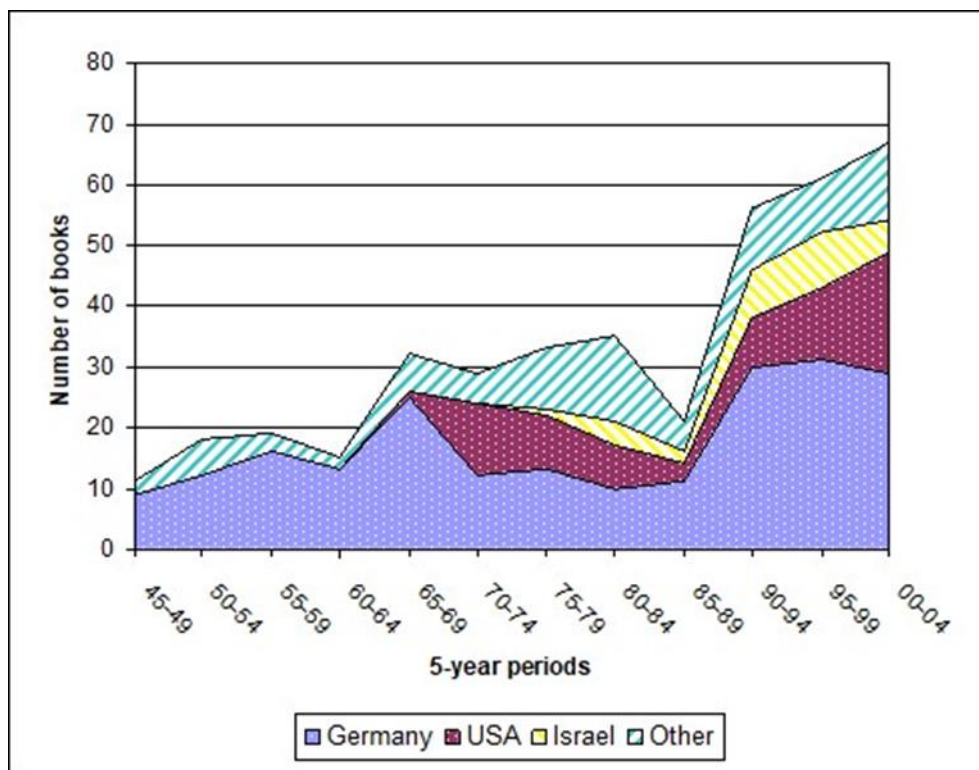
1. Early Activists

In my thesis, I had Christian Zionism begin, for the most part, only in the 1970s.

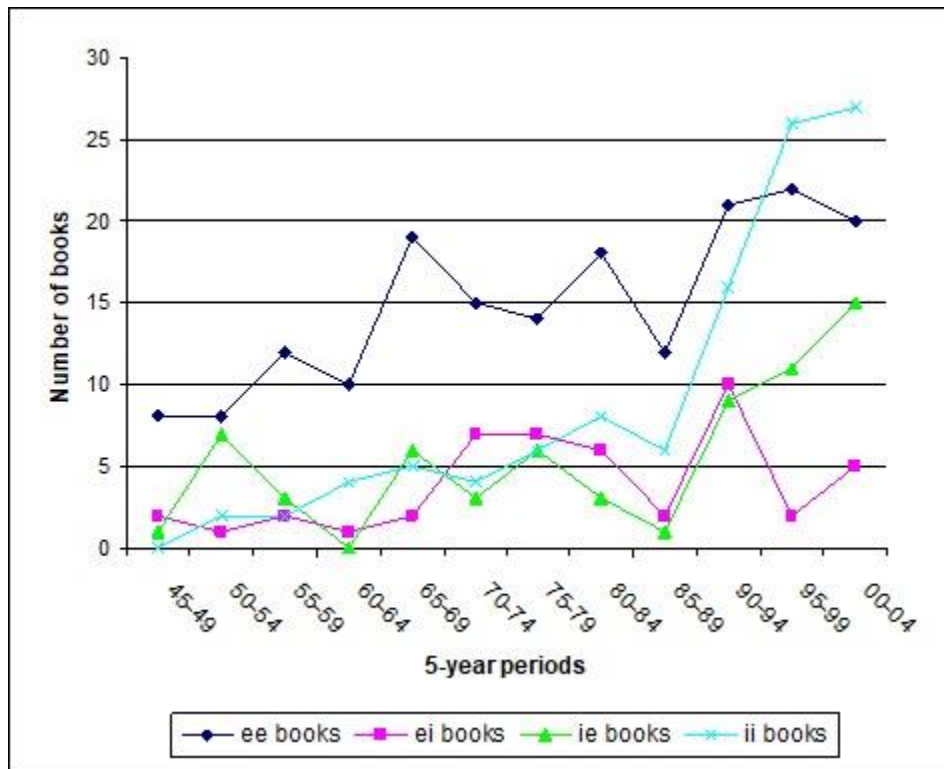
Not without reason: Christians who wrote and spoke of Israel earlier remained strangely passive. They confined themselves to commentary and eschatological speculation: How did all this fit into the predictions of the biblical prophets and into the end-time scenarios? Apart from missionary outreach to Jews, there was rarely any active involvement.

An important part of my thesis was an evaluation of the popular literature on the subject, based on about 400 books in German on the topics of the end times and Israel. Three graphics.

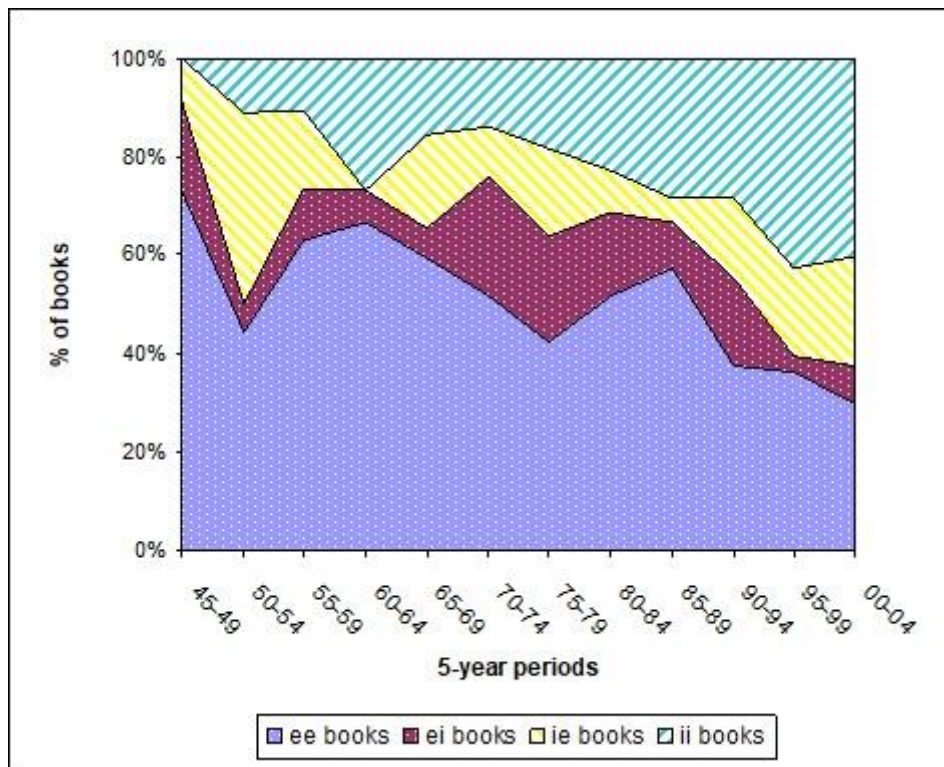
The first graph shows the development in the number of newly published books 1945-2004, in time blocks of five years, divided according to the nationality of the author. Apart from a dent in the mid-eighties, the number steadily rises.



The second graph shows the development in the number of newly published books, also in blocks of five years. Here, they are divided by topic and emphasis, distinguishing end-time (ee, ei) and Israel (ie, ii) books. Beginning around 1990, it shows a clear shift in emphasis to Israel.



The third graph uses the same data but shows the four categories as a percentage, making the pronounced shift in emphasis more visible.



The formation of organizations shows a similar picture. With a few exceptions, organizations dedicated to supporting Israel did not emerge until 1980. During the 50s and 60s, there were hardly any organizational, political, or other initiatives among evangelicals that tried to actively support Israel. A turnaround did not begin until the 1970s.

John Walvoord, a leading American dispensationalist, wrote in 1963 “I am not aware of any dispensationalists actively supporting the Zionist movement as a political movement” (quoted in Malachy 1978: 114).

Why the turnaround? Why did it take so long for active support to develop? And what was the trigger?

There are several factors, but most important were events in the Middle East, especially in 1967 and 1973; they were the real trigger. For many, the Six-Day War in 1967 was unequivocal proof that God was on Israel’s side. A miracle. The Jews had survived 2,000 years of exile and persecution. Adolf Hitler had tried to wipe them out. Against all odds, it was precisely after this attempt at extermination that the Jews succeeded in founding their state – like the phoenix rising from the ashes. Then, when a second Holocaust loomed, this time at the hands of Arab aggressors, they crushed all their enemies in less than a week, taking possession of almost all the land God had promised Abraham, including Jerusalem. After this unexpected turnaround, the question was obvious: Was this salvation an act of God?

To many evangelicals, the answer was equally obvious: Yes! Any scepticism due to the secular, non-religious character of Zionism was now put to rest. After 1967, a theoretical end-time expectation that had been developed by Puritans, Pietists, and Dispensationalists, among others, became more and more associated with a phenomenon of the present. Reflections on a theoretical country of the future, beyond the Second Coming, increasingly gave way to interest in a state on this side of the end of the world. Different from the Israel in the Bible and the Israel of the future, this Israel could be touched! The dramatic events of those six days, plus their interpretation as history of salvation, made this reassessment of Israel possible.

Then came the Yom Kippur War of 1973. It made clear that God’s miracle was not secure but threatened. In addition, there were the rise of the PLO, the Palestinian terrorism of the 1970s, the threat of an oil embargo, the adoption by the United Nations of a resolution equating Zionism with racism, the rise of anti-Zionism on the radical left, and the increasing criticism of Israel from the World Council of Churches, liberal churches, and the media. At the same time, German foreign policy sought to move closer to the Arabs.

Based on this list, one can understand the perception, whether right or wrong, that the whole world was turning against Israel and that Israel was being treated terribly unfairly by the world community. Under these circumstances, it was impossible for evangelicals to stand idly by. And so, through Israel’s success and Israel’s peril, the Christian Zionist movement came into being – in the name of justice, and because the completion of world history was at stake in the spiritual battle for Israel.

So far so good. [Daniel Hummel \(2019\)](#) describes a similar development due to events in the Middle East, as does [Lewis \(2021\)](#). But what I overlooked, or at least underestimated, are the Christian Zionists of the more distant past – and I now think one can certainly use this term in the 19th century in Great Britain and to a lesser extent in America – see Lewis (2021: 92-117).

For example, the American William E. Blackstone (1841-1935). From the Wikipedia entry “[William E. Blackstone](#)” (2023):

He initially focused on the restoration of the Jews to the Holy Land as a prelude to their conversion to Christianity, out of a pious wish to hasten the coming of the Messiah; but he increasingly became concerned with the deadly, Russian, government-instigated pogroms and believed that it was necessary to create a Jewish homeland in Israel. He was, furthermore, persuaded that neither the European nations nor the United States would accept as many Jews as needed to escape from Europe.

Blackstone and his daughter traveled to the Holy Land in 1888. He returned convinced that a return of the Jewish people to its ancient homeland was the only possible solution to the persecution Jews suffered elsewhere. On November 24-25, 1890, Blackstone organized the Conference on the Past, Present and Future of Israel at the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Chicago where participants included leaders of both Jewish and Christian communities, albeit not leaders of the Reform movement.

The conference issued a call urging the great powers, including the Ottoman Empire, to return Israel to the Jews.

In other words, an essential trigger for William Blackstone's involvement was the pogroms in Russia.

The conference decided to initiate a petition, which Blackstone implemented and published in 1891. It is known as the Blackstone Memorial, a call for American support for the restoration of Israel.

The memorial was signed by 413 prominent Christian and a few Jewish leaders in the United States. Blackstone personally gathered the signatures of men such as John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, Cyrus McCormick, senators, congressmen, religious leaders of all denominations, newspaper editors, the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and others. (Ibid.)

This is before Theodor Herzl published *The Jewish State* (1896) and before the first Zionist Congress in 1897.

Blackstone was a dispensationalist. Most of the signatories were not. And Blackstone's motivation was certainly not just his dispensationalist end-time expectation.

Later, in 1916, the memorial was put forward a second time, at the insistence of American Jews, this time only privately – directly to President Wilson. 1916. It was instrumental in enabling the British to issue the Balfour Declaration: The American government was persuaded against resistance, perhaps even in favour of quiet support.

The roots go further back. Robert Smith describes a petition by Johanna Cartwright and Ebenezer Cartwright, at a council of war in January 1649: England and the Netherlands were to bring Israelites to the promised land, which would bring God's blessing to the nation:

That it presses this Judeo-centric tradition [of Restorationism] into political service makes it the first example of Christian Zionism, understood as political action, informed by specifically Christian commitments, to promote or preserve Jewish control over the geographic area now comprising Israel and Palestine. (Smith 2013: 96)

Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801-1885), advocated that Great Britain should support a Jewish return to Palestine. In 1838, also through his influence, a British consul was sent to Jerusalem; in 1841, a Jerusalem diocese with a bishop was founded, initially together with Prussia.

Soon after Herzl published his Zionist pamphlet, William Hechler, a German-Englishman, was at his door. Hechler was a clergyman at the British embassy in Vienna for many years. He was convinced

that the restoration of Israel was necessary and imminent; he was enthusiastic about Herzl's book. And Hechler had good connections. He opened the door for Herzl to several decision-makers in Europe, including an audience with Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1898. Nothing concrete came of it, except that Herzl and his Zionist project gained credibility; after all, he was in contact with makers and shakers of his time.

One more example: Orde Wingate (1903-1944), officer in the British army, arrived in Palestine, then a British Mandate, in 1936. He allied himself with the Zionists against the Arab encroachments, which had increased sharply. From 1938, Wingate was in charge of the newly formed Special Night Squads, which consisted of British and Jews, including Yigal Allon and Moshe Dayan, and fought Arab saboteurs. It was a contribution to the formation of an effective army that was able to fight for Israel's independence in 1948.

Shaftesbury, Blackstone, Hechler, Orde Wingate. They were only a few. But firstly, it is questionable whether the State of Israel could have come into being without their help and preparatory work. And secondly, in their home countries they were backed by a broad basic swell of sympathy for the idea of Jewish restoration. Multitudes of British and Americans expected such a development and viewed it favourably.

Balfour and the British government in 1917, Harry S. Truman in 1948 (the president who pushed through U.S. recognition of the State of Israel) – they could assume that a significant part of their constituents would receive this step positively, because the idea of restoring the Jews to Israel was so popular.

When the opportunity arises or there is a need, the expectation of restoration can quickly become more – but not always and by no means for everyone. That is why I still think the distinction between restorationism and Christian Zionism is important. But the dividing line is unsharp and flexible, and one can certainly speak of Christian Zionism as early as the 19th century, albeit mainly limited to Great Britain. It was more important than I previously realized.

2. Global Christianity: The Role of the “New” Christians

In my doctoral thesis, I wrote that the movement is international, not just British-American, but I didn't sufficiently realize the extent of the shift that is taking place.

The vast majority of Christian Zionists now live in the Global South. And they are primarily neo-Pentecostal and not necessarily dispensationalist.

I already mentioned Daniel Hummel and his “new Christian Zionism”. Hummel ([2017](#); [2019](#): 3, 212ff) refers to a new type of Christian Zionism. It is charismatic, international, and global – not primarily American.

As Hummel points out, this has consequences. Some non-Western countries, such as Brazil and Nigeria, will find it harder to be critical of Israel if large Christian minorities within their borders enthusiastically support Israel.

The new face of Christian Zionism is perhaps most visible in the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ). Founded in 1980, it has subsidiaries and representatives in over 90 countries. The Dutch played an important role in its foundation. For a long time, the ICEJ was led by Malcolm Hedding, a South African. Now Jürgen Bühler, a German doctor, is president.

For more than 40 years, the ICEJ has been celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, an anticipation of what is prophesied in Zechariah 14:16:

Then everyone who survives of all the nations that have come against Jerusalem shall go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Booths.

Several thousand participants from up to 100 nations take part. The highlight of the festival is a march through Jerusalem. The new face of Christian Zionism is neither European nor American; it is international. This video gives a taste of the event:

<https://youtu.be/OjLZYidYVQw>

3. Blessings: A New Prosperity Gospel

In my research, I noticed how often a certain Bible verse was repeated almost mantra-like in relevant publications: Genesis 12:3.

“I will bless those who bless you”. Interestingly, the entire promise in 12:1-3 is addressed to Abraham as an individual; the personal second-person pronouns are in the singular throughout and refer to Abraham. But this is passed over in silence. Not a word. The promise is directly applied to Israel and Jews today. The implicit interpretation (always implicit) is: *you* refers to the people of Israel; whoever blesses Israel will be blessed (cf. Westbrook 2014: 180f).

Once in the Bible, this statement is indeed made with regard to Israel. In Numbers 24:9b, Bileam states something similar to Genesis 12:3, except that it is said of Israel: “Blessed be he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you!” *You* here is also singular, but it clearly refers to Israel, unlike in Genesis 12. Numbers, however, does not play a role in Christian Zionism.

It astonished me at the time, this consistent presenting of “Whoever blesses Israel will be blessed” as if it were a self-evident fact, although it actually misreads the text.

Back then, I asked the question whether this might not create another gospel in which Israel to a certain extent takes the place of Jesus, a question also asked by Franz Stuhlhofer (1992: 77):

Who is God’s messenger of blessing to the world? Is it Jesus? In the case of Malgo, at least in places, it is Israel! “Israel is God’s mediator of blessing and salvation for this world”.

Christian Zionists will certainly reject this insinuation (another gospel), but: Whoever wants to be blessed, according to Christian Zionism, must bless Israel – sufficient reason to pause and ponder. Statements like these make one wonder:

In the Jewish question – today the Israel question – all people are challenged. This question of all questions is again about setting a course in human history – about a turning point ... Everyone must take a stand on the question of Israel, find his answer before people and God! (Reusch 2003: 13)

All religious systems strive to give meaning to human existence and the existence of the world. In this respect, the apostle Paul offers nothing special in Romans 1-8 and 12-16 [!]. However, with the explanations in Romans 9-11 we come across the fundamental difference between all religious efforts and biblical revelation. (Gerloff 2002: 16)

All of us who are not Jews owe every single important spiritual blessing we have ever inherited to a single people: the Jews. (Prince 1997: 63)

Again, so far so good. However, what I had not seen is that, in conjunction with ethnonationalism, something new is emerging here, a new form of the prosperity gospel.

At this points, we can make sense of Michelle Bolsonaro, her t-shirt, and [her Instagram post](#).

Christian Zionism is now more than just support for Israel. It is a kind of symbiosis, between states and peoples: we support Israel; the blessing flows back to our country. A new identity is emerging that connects Jews and Israel and Christians: We are one! In doing so, the national is not abolished; it remains part of the new identity.

Once more, I turn to [Matthew Westbrook](#); he emphasizes that the national symbols of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Jerusalem March are not just colourful decorations:

The expressions of national sentiment are not secondary to participation in the parade, but the very essence and its *raison d'être*. (Westbrook 2014: 180)

The costumes of the participants, who also march together as national groups, are expressions designed not only to “bless” Jewish Israelis, but to generate divine favor for their home nation. (Ibid.: 181)

The participants feel the same way. By the way, when Westbrook was researching, Brazilians were the largest group at the festival, followed by Finland, Germany, and Taiwan. The United States were only in 5th or 6th place (ibid.: 192).

Daniel Hummel sees it similarly to Westbrook:

While reliant on Pentecostal and prosperity theology, the new Christian Zionism appeals to non-American Christians because of its promises of practical and material benefits. This is no end-times escapism or even right-wing political ideology. Rather, in the twenty-first century, Israel represents hope for the largest generation of new Christians around the globe. As Israel expands its outreach to Christians into the new global Pentecostalism, we are likely witnessing a key arena in which the future of the Middle East will be decided.

Whatever the geopolitical fortunes of the new Christian Zionism, its existence points to a remarkable shift in the Jewish-Christian relationship. The unifying premise of the contemporary movement – the expectation of divine national blessing that will follow from supporting Israel – is never far from the surface. And much like the fate of Christianity in the twenty-first century, the fate of Christian Zionism will increasingly be decided away from the traditional sources of American Evangelicalism and Western governments. ([Hummel 2017](#); Westbrook takes a similar view; cf. [Hummel 2019](#): 212ff; [Durbin 2019](#): 205f).

I will end with these conclusions: For many Christian Zionists, Israel is more important than end-time theory. And even where eschatology remains important, the motivation for supporting Israel is usually more diverse. Eschatology is not the only factor and is not always important. And if eschatology plays a role, then it is often a different one than that of doomsday scenarios.

In other words, positions on the State of Israel are rooted in eschatological ideas, though often not dispensationalist. Large sections of Christian Zionism are now growing beyond these roots, partly by developing a much more dynamic end-time expectation.

To state this differently, positions on the State of Israel are only in part the result of eschatological choices. And the influence also works in the opposite direction: positions on the State of Israel are now leading to new eschatological choices.

Bibliography

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