

HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

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The intent of this article is to show how the creation of the state of Israel and the defeat of the Arab forces in 1967 have contributed to the promotion of certain eschatological expectations among Christian fundamentalists in America and how these expectations are reflected in their pro-Israeli activities. At the same time we want to point to the way in which the same events have affected the concepts of apocalyptic scenarios in contemporary Islam.

Key words: Israel, Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, scriptures, prophecy, apocalyptic, scenarios, millennialism, the Messiah, dispensationalism, evangelicalism, Christian fundamentalism, Christian Zionism, second coming of Christ, Six-Day War, Armageddon, ICEJ, holocaust, the Last-Day, Mahdī, 'Isā, Dağğāl.

1. Instruments of redemption

1.1. The challenge of the Temple Mount

On June 7th, 1967 Israeli troops took East Jerusalem. The Temple Mount was brought under Jewish sovereignty for the first time since the year 70.

"The capture by Israel of the Temple Mount opened a Pandora's box of questions for Jewish religious authorities. These ranged from whether to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute the sacrificial service to whether to allow Jews to ascend the Temple Mount to pray. The official Israeli Chief Rabbinate adopted a mostly conservative stance toward the new circumstances created. Halakhic factors interplayed with governmental pressure to avoid hostile reactions from the Muslim world" (1). Israel's leading rabbis have overwhelmingly ruled that Jews should not enter the gates of the Mount. In spite of the massive victory Israel's leaders decided to leave the Mount in Muslim hands. With al-Ḥaram aš-Šarīf and its Muslim holy places under Muslim authority, the imminent danger of war with the world community of Muslims could be avoided.

The Chief Rabbinate as the spiritual head of Orthodox Jewry sought to adopt a *halakhically*-acceptable position: the commonly cited reason for the rabbis' decision is a biblical text (Numbers 19) which represents a kind of technical obstacle preventing Jews from entering the Mount. It states that anyone who touches a corpse, or bone, or grave, anyone who finds himself in the same room as a dead body, becomes impure and must not enter the Temple. In order to free a person of impurity it is necessary to mix the ashes of a heifer with water and sprinkle it on him or her. It must be "a red heifer without defect, in which there is no blemish and on which no yoke has been laid" (Numbers 19: 2). As proximity to death is a normal part of life, every Jew became impure by reason of contact with it. This fact did not matter much in the past, after the Romans razed the Temple. There was no sanctuary to enter. Today the situation is different. With the Old City of Jerusalem firmly in Jewish hands, there cannot reasonably be any serious obstacle to the construction of the Temple, should the Israeli authorities decide to undertake it — except for the nightmare of the deadly conflict with the Muslim world. However bizarre it may seem, the missing ashes of the red heifer came to have far-reaching consequences as an important factor in the strategic and political balance in the Middle East.

In the past 19 centuries religious Jews have prayed daily: "May it be Thy will that the Temple be speedily rebuilt in our days". The statement issued by Israel's Chief Rabbinate in 1967 echoes this idea. It ends with the prayer that "the Holy One Blessed be He will speed our full Redemption, and we will joyously...visit His sanctuary and serve with a full heart, quickly and in our days". The meaning is clear: the Temple will be rebuilt only when God sends his messiah, in future for which the faithful have to pray and wait. (2).

Not all sages, however, hold this opinion. Some claim that although the messiah has not yet appeared, a cosmic process, called the beginning of redemption, has begun. During this period some of the previous religious laws should be allegedly disregarded, others should be changed (3). History is nearing its climax. Ancient prophecies are coming true before our eyes.

The concept of an End of Days, when God's kingdom will be established on earth, can be found in all three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For them history is unrepeatable, the future of history is final. God's promises for the future are known and comprehended in the irreversible historical events. The meaning of history is found in its future goal and fulfillment. In all three faiths these eschatologic ideas are often suppressed. If we see them flourishing with new vigour today, it is precisely because of the existence of the state of Israel. The creation of the state and the conquest of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967 are, for many, more than ordinary historical events. They are signs that the end is near and it will be played out in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mount.

Gershon Gorenberg sums up (4): "The dispute over who owns the Mount is one of the most intractable issues of real-world Middle Eastern politics. The conflict is intense because of the Mount's place in history — but even more because of its place in the future. For a small but growing group of Jews on the Israeli religious right, every day since 1967 has been a missed opportunity to begin building the Third Temple. For a far greater number of conservative Christians elsewhere in the world — and particularly in the United States — building the Temple is an essential condition for the Second Coming of Christ. And for many Muslims, any attempt to destroy the shrines of al-Aqsa is a sign that the Hour is at hand."

1.2. Millennialism and its many aspects.

It may sound strange to the modern mind, but belief in the end is something tens of millions of people speak of openly in the traditional language of religion. It is part of our lives. In 2002, after the Islamist terrorists attacked New York and Washington, 59 percent of Americans believed that the apocalyptic prophecies of the Book of Revelation would come true (5). Commenting on the rise of Christianity in the United States, the same author mentions the *Left Behind* series by Tim La Haye and Jerry B. Jenkins. By the early 2000s these books about the end-time, published by a religious publisher in Illinois, sold 11 million copies and their popularity was rising. When *Assassins*, book number six in the series, placed high on *The New York Times* bestseller list, people knowledgeable in the publishing business said they never heard of it and scholars of religion admitted they never opened any Left behind book. We suspect that Samuel Huntington himself probably did not open any of them either. The *Left behind* phenomenon is a clear but largely ignored statement from Evangelical (6) America, a cultural province that the rest of the country often treats as *terra incognita* (7). In the meantime the authors also produced a children's version of the series. Apocalyptic belief has become a big business.

These books are novels, and not theological or political texts. Their message, however, is theological and political. It emphasises the belief in the second coming of Jesus Christ and the necessity for a Jewish state to be restored in historic Palestine and beyond, prior to the second coming. The logo at www.leftbehind.com, openly proclaiming: 'the future is clear', points out that strand of theology which in the last decades pervaded American-style Evangelical Christianity, namely *premillennial dispensationalism*. Neither the substantive nor the adjective is a household word in these parts of the world and will need explanation.

In Christian terms, the term millennium refers to the thousand years period that is mentioned six times in the first seven verses of *Revelation 20*.

"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. And I saw thrones, and they set on them, and judgement was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who have been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years. Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea."

This passage is the foundation on which many are led to believe that Christ will physically live and reign on the earth with his saints for a literal period of one thousand years, before their eternal heavenly existence. This belief reappears in spite of the fact that such a thousand year reign of Christ is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

As a branch of eschatology, millennialism is concerned with the earthly prospects of humanity. It does not limit itself to the prospects of the individual in this world and in the next. It attempts to answer such questions as: What will be the final end of this world? Will the dream of an earthly paradise ever come true? Or will all human beings be destroyed in a cataclysm or fire brought about by their own foolish acts or by God's judgement? Millennialism is thus a chronology of future events comparable to history as the chronology of the past.

Millennialism may take various forms. The one which interests us here is *premillennialism*. It holds that Christ will return, amid catastrophes, before the millennium. This belief was common in the early Christian Church and many ante-Nicene Christian writers supported it (Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and others). It was not fully developed beyond the basic idea that Christ would return and establish his kingdom in Israel and would reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. Later it was discredited because it became too materialistic. In the fourth century Augustine condemned the materialistic attitudes associated with premillennialism and consolidated the *amillennial* position: the thousand year period was a figurative time corresponding with the church age. Augustine's allegorical millennialism became the official doctrine of the Church. It

proclaimed that the kingdom of God was already here; one entered it through true faith. Salvation was to be personal and spiritual, not public and political (8). Premillennialist ideas became obliterated eventually being branded as heretical.

A burst of apocalyptic expectations came about in the wake of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. Reading the Old Testament in a new manner, some messianic groups believed that Jews would play an important role in the events of the End Times which they saw as imminent. The English Revolution in the mid-seventeenth century also stirred the messianic imagination of some Protestants and gave rise to premillennialist groups that took interest in the prospect of the return of the Jews to Palestine (9). It is already at this stage that the basic characteristics of Christian interest in the Jewish return to Palestine, generally referred to as *Christian Zionism*, can be observed. These Christians, in contrast to other branches of Christianity, saw the Jews as the continuers of biblical Israel, heirs to the covenant between God and Abraham, and the object of biblical prophecies. The return of the Jews to Palestine was for them the first step of the messianic timetable (10). Their image of the Jews, however, was based on scriptures, not on direct encounter with them. They did not know the real life of the Jews and did not care for their aspirations.

1.3. Nelson Darby, *premillennial dispensationalism*, and America

Christian Zionism reappeared with a new vigour in the early decades of the nineteenth century, with the rise of the Evangelical movement in Britain and a new fascination with prophecy. Later in the century a new impulse for the movement came from certain John Darby.

John Nelson Darby (1800 - 82), a minister of the Church of England, renounced his position in the Church and became a member of a separatist Christian group in Plymouth which called itself the Plymouth Brethren. The distinctive theology of the sect which Darby further developed, was devised for the final days of history. While the division of history into a number of periods (dispensations) was not new, it was Darby's idea to divide the historical time into seven dispensations, beginning with creation, and ending with the millennial kingdom of Jesus, following the battle of Armageddon (11). In each dispensation God tested humanity through a different plan of salvation (12). Mankind failed all the tests, and each historical period ended in catastrophic divine judgement. The first dispensation ended with the fall of Adam and Eve and with the expulsion from Eden, the second ended with the Flood, the third with the Tower of Babel etc. The Book of Daniel (9: 24 - 27) provided Darby with the clue for understanding further developments. It says that seventy weeks of years will pass between the return of Jews from the Babylonian captivity and

the reign of the messiah. After the end of the sixth week Jesus appeared, but the Jews refused to accept him. So a new dispensation began, that of the Church. We live in the sixth era, the Christian age, and are heading toward catastrophe. At the end of this dispensation, after seven years of wars and calamities, Jesus will establish a literal kingdom in Jerusalem and will reign for a thousand years (13).

Dispensationalism represented gravely pessimistic and antimodern attitudes. Rejecting the prevailing postmillennialism which taught that Christ's kingdom will grow out of the spiritual and moral progress of this age, dispensationalists warned that the current age was marked by progressive corruption of so-called Christian civilization. The Kingdom of Christ would not be brought in by united Christian effort, as the Social Gospel (14) had promised, but only by the dramatic return of Jesus to set up his kingdom in Jerusalem. Believers should give up the illusion of "Christian civilization". As Evangelicals often said of the Social Gospel: why try to clean up the state rooms of the Titanic, when you know it is doomed? (15)

Premillennialist dispensationalism has become part and parcel of a conservative Evangelical creed in America, serving as a philosophy of history for conservative Christians, because it goes well with their critical outlook on contemporary culture.

According to Darby, God has two separate but parallel means of working - one through the Church, the other through Israel. Thus there is, and always will be, a distinction between Israel and the Church. "Rather than subscribing to the view that the Church replaced Israel (16), Darby claimed that Israel would replace the Church, which was a mere parenthesis to God's continuing covenantal relationship with Israel" (17). Dispensationalists define the Church as the body of true believers, who have undergone inner experiences of conversion, have accepted Jesus as their personal saviour and have taken upon themselves to live a saintly life. Only they will be spared the horrors preceding the arrival of the Messiah. The messianic times will begin with the Rapture of the Church. The true believers will be snatched from earth and meet Jesus in the air. They will remain with Jesus for seven years, being spared the miseries inflicted on those who remained on earth. About two thirds of humanity will perish (18).

Based on their literal interpretative principle, dispensationalists hold that promises made to Abraham and through him to the Jews, are eternal and unconditional and await realization. This means that the boundaries of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants from the Nile to the Euphrates will be literally instituted. Jesus Christ will return to a theocratic Jewish kingdom centred on the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. In this way the Church on earth is

reduced to the second plan in contrast to God's main mission to save national Israel.

Darby was a charismatic figure and zealous missionary for his beliefs. By the time of his death, about 1500 separatist Brethren churches had been founded world-wide. According to Don Wagner (19) Darby travelled farther than Apostle Paul and was a Greek and Hebrew scholar whose writings filled forty volumes. Later in life he concentrated on America where he influenced such Evangelical leaders as D. L. Moody, W. E. Blackstone and Cyrus Scofield. Through his *Scofield reference Bible*, Scofield introduced Darby's ideas to a wide audience in America and the English speaking world. For the first time dispensationist notes were added to the biblical text. The Bible was published by the Oxford University Press and became the leading Bible used by American Evangelicals and Fundamentalists for the next sixty years. By 1945 more than 2 million copies had been published in the United States alone. In 1984 a new edition based on New International Version was published followed by CD Rom electronic version.

Since the nineteenth century premillennialist Christians have come up with a number of initiatives with the aim of promoting the restoration of the Jews in Palestine. These efforts long predated the origin of political Zionism. Evangelical Christians in Britain tried to persuade the British government to intercede with the Ottoman Turks and propose the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine (20). There was strong support for the establishment of a Jewish state among American Evangelicals as well. For William E. Blackstone, Zionism was the fulfilment of prophecy. He decided to take an active line and help bring about Jewish national restoration to Palestine. In 1881 he organized a petition known as the *Blackstone Memorial* that carried the signatures of 413 prominent Americans including the chief of the Supreme Court, the Speaker of the House, the greatest industrialists of the age, famous clergymen, writers and journalists.

Addressed to the President of the United States, Benjamin Harrison, and the secretary of state, Jame G. Blaine, the memorial asked them to "use their offices and influence . . . to secure the holding at an early date an international conference to consider the condition of the Israelites and their claims to Palestine as their ancient home." (21). The "Blackstone Memorial" firmly planted in many minds the notion that the United States had a special role and mission in God's plan for humanity: that of a modern Cyrus, to help restore the Jews to Zion. Blackstone asserted that God has chosen America for that mission on account of its moral superiority over other nations, and America will be judged according to the way it carries out this mission (22).

When the Zionist movement was born at the end of the nineteenth century, premillennialists believed prophecy was clearly coming true. Evangelical Christians maintained a profound interest in the events that were taking place in

the life of the Jewish people and especially in the development of the Jewish community in Israel. Zionists became perceived as a major force for modernization of Palestine as well as realization of prophecy. American Zionists drew parallels between the American pioneer experience and the Zionist colonization of Palestine. The Zionist Jews in Israel were described as the modern version of America's 'brave and pious settlers', the Jewish Puritans. As the American settlers were 'facing the dangers of Indian warfare', so the Zionists braved the Arab attacks. (23). The American Jewish community, however, responded with outrage to the Christian restorationist efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many American Jews saw them as a scheme for deportation that threatened their status as American citizens. They held that Judaism had transcended nationalism and was to be understood as a universal religion of Jews who belonged to many nations.(24)

After World War II Christian Zionists resurfaced as a force to be counted with. Their response to the establishment of the State of Israel was enthusiastic. It was a clear indication that Darby got it right. The countdown to Armageddon has begun. This conviction was given even more credence by the Israeli victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. The ancient promises God made to Israel were becoming reality as a literal fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy. This mood was clearly reflected in the writings of Hal Lindsey.

Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), described in the *New York Times* in 1993 as number one non-fiction bestseller of the decade, has gone through more than 108 printings and 27 million copies were sold in English and estimated 20 million in more than 54 other languages. It is a typical Evangelical mixture of biblical literalism and political analysis with biblical predictions fulfilled almost to the letter. Lindsey insists that biblical prophecy is being fulfilled in this generation and signals the imminent destruction of the world. He describes how the massive Russian, Chinese and African armies, the forces of communism and militant Islam, will attempt to destroy Israel, but will fail. He offers illustrated plans showing future military movements of armies and naval convoys leading up to the battle of Armageddon. "Terrible fighting will centre around the city of Jerusalem.. . so many people will be slaughtered in the conflict that blood will stand to the horses' bridles for a total distance of two hundred miles northward and southward of Jerusalem "(Revelation 14: 20) (25). Jesus will come to rescue, be proclaimed King of the Jews and rule over the nations from the rebuilt temple of Jerusalem.

1.4. Christian Zionists and the Jewish State

Since the 1970s the Evangelicals have exerted considerable influence over American policy. Radical religious groups developed into a major political and cultural force with a considerable influence on the attitudes, commitments and

votes of a large number of religious and secular Americans (26). Christian fundamentalists' support for the Jewish state has become a central plank of what is known as the Christian Right. The Christian Right includes a growing number of churches, organizations, fellowship groupings and individuals. The reach of Christian Zionism extends through Christian television, radio and publishing. The National Religious Broadcasting Organization which controls ninety percent of religious radio and television in the United States, is dominated by Christian Zionists (27). The Evangelical Christian constituency was a major factor in the election of Jimmy Carter to the Presidency in 1976 and of Ronald Reagan in 1980.

Mezvinsky (28) mentions a typical reaction to official statements found anti-Israeli by the Christian Right. Jimmy Carter shocked his Evangelical constituency using the expression "Palestinian homeland" in his speech in March 1977. Full-page newspaper advertisements appeared throughout the country, proclaiming: "The time has come for Evangelicals to affirm their belief in biblical prophecy and Israel's divine right to the Holy Land. . . We affirm as Evangelicals our belief in the promised land to the Jewish people. . . We would view with grave concern any effort to carve out of the Jewish homeland another nation or political entity." The swing of Evangelicals from Carter to Reagan in 1980 was a major factor in Carter's defeat.

George Bush's administration has been influenced by Evangelical, pro-Israeli sentiment even more than that of his predecessors. George W. Bush, who became a born-again Christian at the age of 39, is clearly a sympathetic follower of Christian Zionism. The influence of pro-Israeli groups and Christian Zionists in such states as Texas and Florida may have been the decisive factor in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections (29). The premillennialist understanding of the State of Israel has been evident in the attitudes of other prominent American public figures as well. D. Pipes draws attention to Sen. Jesse Helms from North Carolina who "forwarded more assertive, tougher position vis-a-vis Palestinians than did the government of Israel." (30). Christian leaders, such as Jerry Falwell and Richard Land, opposed President Bush's "road map" more vocally than their Jewish counterparts. Together with the Israeli lobby, the influence of the Christian Right is a major factor preventing the United States from exercising evenhandedness in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Thus Christian Zionists have become a major barrier to peace in the Middle East. Their scenario for the future leaves little room for negotiating with Arabs and seriously undermines the authority of the global community and international institutions. The *Left Behind* books present the United Nations as an instrument Antichrist uses to try to frustrate the will of God (31).

1.5. Christian Zionists in Israel

The years following the Six-Day War also saw an increase of the actual presence and activity of Christian Zionists in Israel. Tours of Evangelical groups to the country increased, as did the numbers of volunteers coming to the *kibbutzim*. Evangelical Christians even established institutions of higher education in Israel.

Mezvinsky (32) ironically comments on the "friendship tour of Israel" in 1983, organized by a prominent American Evangelical leader Jerry Falwell:

"Falwell's tour and trips to Jerusalem supposedly heralded the immigration of Jews into Israel as the sign of the imminent second coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus would rapture true Christians in the air, while the rest of humankind would be slaughtered below. Then 144,000 Jews (some dispensationalists say a few more) would bow down before Jesus and be saved, but the remainder would perish in the mother of all Holocausts. This could happen even while the Evangelical pilgrims were in Jerusalem, thus giving them a ringside seat at the battle of Armageddon."

The best known Christian Zionist organization in Israel is the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ). It was founded in 1980 as an attempt by Zionist Christians to reverse the effect of the decision by the international community to vacate their embassies in Jerusalem in protest against Israel's continuing occupation of the West Bank. The embassy's major work has been to promote support for Israel among Evangelicals worldwide and to initiate various philanthropical programs in Israel. It opened branches in many countries (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Holland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Recently its representatives have also worked for its interests in Eastern Europe including the Czech Republic and Slovakia (33). In Jerusalem, the ideologue of the ICEJ, van der Hoeven, has continued to admonish the Jews to be faithful to their role within God's cosmic plan. Israel should listen to God rather than to the United States Secretary of State and should not give up territory (34). The Jewish authorities' attitude to the ICEJ is pragmatic: they are happy to use it as a means of gaining support while ignoring its eschatological expectations.

In 1996 the Proclamation of the Third International Christian Zionist Congress organized by ICEJ outlined the position of many Evangelical Christian Zionists. It stated: 1. God judges all people on how well they treat Jews; 2. Islam comprises an anti-Jewish and anti-Christian distortion of the true faith of Abraham; 3. Jews have the absolute right to possess and dwell in the Golan Heights and all of what are now the occupied territories as an everlasting possession by an eternal covenant with God; 4. Islamic claims to Jerusalem derive not from the Quran or early Islamic traditions but from later, more

secular origins; 5. Jerusalem must remain undivided under Israeli sovereignty and the capital of Israel only (35).

Members of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) see the Embassy as an institution offering one-sided support for Israel and have signed petitions condemning its activities. The ICEJ also aroused resentment among many liberal Protestants. In their opinion Israel should be judged, like all other countries, on the basis of political justice and morality. Most liberal Protestants in the West, however, have paid little attention to the situation of native Arab Christians both in Israel and in the occupied territories. "As the Christian Palestinian community is destroyed through desperation, forced emigration and spiritual dissolution, their churches have become 'authentic' caretakers for tourist museums without worshippers" (36) It seems that the cradle of Christianity is slowly turning into a Christian Disneyland.

1.6. Christian Zionists and the building of the Temple

Christian premillennialists have become especially fascinated by the idea of building the Temple. For it is not enough for the Jews to return to their land. Before the End can come, there has to be the Temple.

"Obstacle or no obstacle," says Lindsey (37) it is certain, that the Temple will be built. Prophecy demands it".

The idea is very much alive among some orthodox Jews as well: "We should not forget ...that the supreme purpose of the ingathering of exiles and the establishment of our state is the building of the Temple. The Temple is at the very top of the pyramid" says Rabbi Shlomo Aviner (38). A Gallup poll conducted in Israel in 1996 found that 58% of Israelis supported the building of the Temple. Jacqueline Rose quotes Ben Gurion: "Without a messianic, emotional, ideological impulse, without the vision of restoration and redemption, there is no earthly reason why even oppressed and underprivileged Jews . . .should wander off to Israel of all places. . ." (39)

Since the 1970s numerous Christian premillennialist groups and individuals have promoted the building of the Jewish shrine through a whole range of activities. They contacted Jewish activists studying the Temple rituals, manufacturing utensils to be used in the sacrifices, weaving special material for the priests' clothing etc. (40). There were efforts made to discover the exact site of the Temple and find the lost arc. Some premillennialists have supported attempts at breeding red heifers. A working relation developed between them and the best known of the Jewish groups aiming at the same goal, the Temple Mount Faithful (41). This group is known for periodic attempts to organize prayers on the Mount and even to plant a cornerstone for the Temple. For most Israeli people such activities are marginal, for their Evangelical supporters, on

the other hand, they are the ultimate expressions of what Zionism is supposed to do.

1.7. Conclusion

We have shown that the basis for the Christian fundamentalists' support for Israel is a specific theological interpretation of this state. For Mezzvinsky Christian Zionism is "largely insensitive to the human rights of Palestinians, demonizes Islam, and assists in the immigration of Jews to Israel. It supports the Israeli government indiscriminately, as a step in the direction of the coming millennium, while too often having little respect for Judaism as such" (42). Convinced that nuclear Armageddon is a part of God's plan, Evangelical dispensationalists are willing to participate in preparations which, they admit, will lead to a holocaust more brutal and overwhelming than Hitler was ever able to imagine.

"Christian Zionists don't love real Jewish people. They love us as characters in their story, in their play, and that's not who we are. . . if you listen to the drama that they are describing, essentially, it's a five-act play in which the Jews disappear in the fourth act" (43).

According to Ariel (44) "one has to conclude that the Christian interest in the Jewish resettlement in Palestine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their support of the Jewish Zionist cause have derived first and foremost from their messianic hope and their mode of interpreting biblical passages. Their support of Jewish causes represents an attempt to promote their own agenda." Jewish leaders do not care for the Christian messianic faith more than Christian premillennialist groups appreciate the Jewish faith, but they see such details as being beside the point. The important thing for the Jews has been the Christian willingness to support their cause. The relationship can be compared to "a marriage of convenience" (45). Gorenberg (46), however, warns: "The Christian millennialists believe that Jews have no idea of the catastrophic consequences of their actions — and encourage them to move forward. And perhaps it would not matter, except that well-intentioned people warming themselves with the idea that Jews building the Temple will lead to the world's final salvation sometimes lend their hands to extremists who act, not in the realm of myth, but in a real country where real conflicts claim real lives."

2. Islamic apocalyptic permutations

2.1. Radical apocalyptic discourse — new sources discovered

Devotion to sacred places is a phenomenon known in all religions. The attitudes of all three Abrahamic faiths towards the 'sacred geography' of Jerusalem have evolved historically and will continue to do so, under intense national conflicts and ever changing social, political and demographic

conditions (47). The main problem is the impossibility of separating the religious/spiritual dimensions of the mutual relations from the secular/political. Religious identities are not necessarily the cause of Arab - Israeli conflict, but these identities can be politically manipulated by religious fundamentalists and secular nationalists into a deadly struggle. Thus the "sacred geography" of Jerusalem continues to inspire powerful emotions among Jews, Muslims and Christians: deep anxiety, intense anger, traumatic pain and strong socio-economic, religio-political and spiritual activity (48) "Anxiety helped make the holy site into an emblem of Palestinian nationalism and the symbol of Islamic revival. It also fed conspiracy theories and apocalyptic permutations of Islam" (49). Step by step the question of Jerusalem assumed cosmic proportions. The Arab-Israeli conflict developed into an apocalyptic event.

Traditional Sunni eschatology is built around the Koran's vivid images of cosmic anarchy (the 'signs of the Hour') and from traditions attributed to Muhammad. In their early manifestations apocalyptic predictions took the literary form known as *ḥadīth* in which either Muhammad or one of his close companions makes a statement about what will happen at the end of the world. The decline of society and cataclysmic events in the natural world announce the 'Last Day', which climaxes in the physical resurrection and the ultimate judgement of all human beings. For Sunnis, this belief is part of *īmān* (faith), the time of the event is known to Allah alone. The sequence of events and the roles of leading figures such as *ʿĪsā* (Jesus), the *Mahdī* ('the rightly guided one') and *Dağḡāl* (the 'Deceiver'), are contested. It is generally accepted, however, that in the world's final days a false messiah, al-masih al-dajjal will conquer the world. Finally Jesus will return to defeat the deceiver in a battle near Jerusalem. It means that for Muslim believers the setting of the last days is Jerusalem. The struggle over Jerusalem has eschatological connotations.

Islamic apocalyptic traditions remained the same for centuries being transmitted with very little alteration both orally and in writing. Until the last decades of the twentieth century this apocalyptic heritage like other parts of the Islamic religious discourse was dominated by the ulama (50). Their writings did not make any effort to relate the traditions to the current events. They were anti-apocalyptic in character and were published with the intention to calm down the excitement of the masses in crucial moments of history. As in other fields of Islamic knowledge, however, the status of the ulema as keepers and interpreters of traditions has been lately challenged by the radicals.

For the Arab Muslim community the founding of the State of Israel and especially the catastrophic defeat of Egypt, Jordan and Syria in 1967 have brought disillusionment and despair. These catastrophes invited new apocalyptic explanations, new interpretations which could provide guidance in treacherous times. Thus a new school of apocalyptic writers appeared which made a serious

effort to create new apocalyptic scenarios based on classical Muslim material. It could hardly be a coincidence that the rise of these radical apocalyptic writers has been concurrent with the rise of radical Islam, although there is no evidence of interdependence (51). The attempts to update the meaning of the apocalyptic ideas of the hadith presented in this article are based on the Arabic-language apocalyptic literature current among Sunni Muslims as analysed by Cook.

For a new vision to respond to the challenges of the humiliating condition of the Muslim community in the twentieth century it was necessary to show that Jews represented an evil power which would be defeated in due time. In this respect search for anti-Jewish material in the sacred texts of Islam did not bring desirable results. Unlike the Bible, the Koran is not an apocalyptic book. Besides, the enemies of Islam in the first centuries were Byzantines and Turks, not Jews. A rich source of usable material was finally found in the classic European anti-Semitic pamphlet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. (52) It means that the anti-Semitic nature of many Islamic radical movements has more to do with Western and secular anti-Semitism than with the theological anti-Judaism of Islam (53).

No modern Muslim apocalypticist hesitates to quote *The Protocols* as an authoritative text. The radicals duly assimilated the conspiracy theory which depicts the world as totally dominated by the Jews. All of history has been controlled by a group of Jews who, because they knew more than the rest, had unlimited amount of money and positions of power, have directed all historical events. Jews are seen both as people and as evil, a demonic power transcending them as people and ultimately controlled by the Antichrist. This is the lens through which the Arabic-language Muslim apocalypsts see the world and interpret the political, economic and religious events. (54).

"The people (i.e. Muslims) have never discovered who the evil and dangerous (one) is, who manipulates this world and pushes it without mercy toward hell, who is it that moves the chess pawns on the wide board, and who has an interest that happens on the face of the earth. There were enlightened opinions and thoughts, and true voices proceeding from some of the intelligentsia in civilized areas, raised in protest and warning at the beginning of the (twentieth) century, saying that there is a hidden hand, half of which is human and half of which is satanic, making a concerted effort to destroy this world, and that there is an evil enemy preparing disaster for humanity" (55).

Another innovation is the massive use of biblical material in spite of strong prohibition against using the Bible from classical times. The pioneer in this approach is the Egyptian writer Sa'id Ayyub, the author of *al-Masih al-Dajjal* (1987). The author uses Biblical prophecies as read by Evangelical Christians. He quotes Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah and comments on Revelation. Ayyub

adopts the Christian messianic fantasies which see the existence of Israel as a sign of the end and transforms them for his own purposes.

Bashir Muhammad 'Abdallah follows in Ayyub's footsteps. Here is his identification of the four beasts in Daniel 7: the British empire is the lion, the Communist empire of Russia is the bear, and the leopard is the United States. As for the fourth beast with ten horns, 'Abdallah identifies it with the beast of *Revelation* 13:1, an identification known from Evangelical Protestant exegesis. Then he provides it with further identity — that of the European Community, that is being ruled by the small horn (7:8), which is Israel (56) Commenting on Daniel 7: 27 ("Then the sovereignty and power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him") 'Abdallah says:

The "saints" are the Muslims, the believers and fighters in the path of God, since they are described in the present-day Antichrist media as fundamentalists, terrorists and extremists. His words "the sovereignty will be handed over (to the saints)" refers to the continuing victory they will have in the establishment of the Islamic caliphate at the hands of the Ancient of Days (the Mahdi) first of all, and then their victory over Crusader (Christian) Europe second of all, and then their final victory under the leadership of of the true messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, over the Antichrist and his armies of Masonic and hypocritical followers thirdly, and after that the purification of the earth from Gog and Magog".

(57)

Many pages in 'Abdallah's book are devoted to proving that New York is Babylon the Great of *Revelation* 18 and to describing the evil practices of its inhabitants:

His Word "And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying: Come here, I shall show you the judgement of the great harlot who sits on many waters" (Rev. 17: 1). She is described as "great" because she is great in her corruption because fornication is symbolic of corruption. She is the fount of the great corruption in the world. He continues describing her as "sitting upon many waters," in other words, peoples, nations, and languages. As to his Word: "with whom the kings of the earth committed acts of immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality" (Rev. 17: 2). This is another proof that this (harlot) is the U.N. and the Security Council in 1990 and after (that date the harlot) that turned the Security Council into the world government with armies punishing peoples, countries, kings, and rulers. This was after the proclamation of the new world order and international law. Thus all of the rulers or most of them have committed acts of immorality with her; in other words, betrayed their Creator

and their peoples, and submitted to her decrees at the expense of their peoples (58).

"Classical Muslim apocalyptic was developed under the influence of and in polemical contact with Christian and Jewish sources. The apparent kinship is therefore not just coincidence. The reopening of this treasure chest has enabled the Muslim apocalyptist to see many more possibilities than those previously available from his own tradition. However, at the same time, it must be noted that this use of two other faiths' apocalyptic heritage has not brought any real level of understanding to the Muslim side. Coming to it as they do with a great deal of Muslim intellectual baggage, reading the Bible in Arabic - which has been an Islamic language for fourteen centuries - inevitably gives it an Islamic hue, and further needing to justify themselves before a hostile audience of conservatives, they have not made any attempt to bridge the gap between Islam and Christianity. In fact, it is very probable they are widening it" (59). Besides . . . "while the basic dialogue remains Muslim, the overarching concept is foreign to Islam". (60)

2.2. Muslim apocalyptic thought in dialogue with the West

Apocalyptic visions produced by Arab Muslims in the Middle East are not the only ones that relate the latest dramatic events such as the Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan to a larger explanatory framework, drawing eternal meaning from the 'chaos' of the ephemeral world. The Naqšbandī-Ḥaqqānī (61) order with roots in Turkey, Cyprus, Lebanon and Syria emerged since the 1970s as one of the fastest growing Sufi orders in the West. The order's teaching promotes mystical themes that include spiritual growth, love, respect for the natural environment and religious toleration, all of which, according to the order, are epitomized in the *sunnah* of the Prophet Muḥammad (62). Part of the teaching is an eclectic apocalyptic scenario grounded in Sunni eschatology but driven by mystically inspired insights into current events and the future. The result is a vision of dangers ahead that resonates deeply with certain groups of Westerners, Christian, Muslim, even non-religious (63). Many of them have become sensitive to various ecological and environmental apocalyptic perspectives current in the West.

Like Sa'id Ayyub, Naqšbandī-Ḥaqqānī šayḥs interpret world events freely using Jewish and Christian terms and images, instantly familiar to many Western audiences, in different contexts. In this way they emphasize how Islam and its spirituality are vital even for non-Muslim listeners.

Both Ayyub and the šayḥs clearly want to communicate with the West. In Cook's view (64) Ayyub and his followers want to express their anger and overcome their isolation. They attempt to break Christians away from the apocalyptic philo-Judaism prevalent among Protestant Evangelicals to win them

over to their own position and at least bring them to see Islam in a positive light. Their message to the West is that Islam is a superior religion and that Christians should convert.

While it may be curiosity or concern over the "last days" that might draw some Westerners to the Naqšbandī-Ḥaqqānī order, these contacts are usually first steps on a journey to discover Islam. In Damrel's words: "Last days" imagery serves as effective teaching tool with which the shaykhs drive home to their followers more subtle spiritual teaching about the afterlife, mystical praxis and Islam. The Ḥaqqānīs speak to modern millennial anxieties, religious disenchantments, interest in prophecy, and the search for spiritual truth — familiar themes informing some of the most diverse and dynamic expressions of spirituality in the modern West — and change the conversation from one about the end of this world to an Islamic dialogue concerned with life in the next." (65)

NOTES

1. Cohen, Y. The political role of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in the Temple Mount Question.
2. Gorenberg, G. The End of Days.
3. Shahak, I and Mezvinsky, N. Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel.
4. Gorenberg, G. The End of Days.
5. Huntington, S. P. Who are we?
6. The term 'Evangelical' refers to the type of conservative Protestantism that stresses Bible study, public testifying to faith and the personal experience of accepting Jesus — being "born again".
7. Gorenberg, G. The End of Days.
8. Augustine, City of God.
9. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
10. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
11. Armageddon (probably Hebrew. "Hill of Megiddo"), in the New Testament, place where the kings of Earth under demonic leadership will wage war on the forces of God at the end of world history.
12. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab-Israeli Conflict.
13. Marsden, G. M. Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.
14. Social Gospel - in American history, a religious social-reform movement that was prominent from about 1870 to 1920, especially among liberal Protestant groups dedicated to betterment of industrialized society through application of the biblical principles of charity and justice.

15. Marsden, G. M. Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism.
16. Since Auschwitz this position (*supersessionism* in American theological terminology) has been the object of heated debates among Christian theologians. In an attempt to reformulate Christian identity without anti-Judaism, the church is encouraged to abandon any form of displacement theory. "The church and its scholars have to realize that there is and always has been an ongoing history of Israel and the Jewish people up to the present: they have been and are contemporaries of the Christians." (Ehrensperger, K. That We May Be Mutually Encouraged)
17. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
18. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
19. Wagner, Don. Anxious for Armageddon.
20. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
21. Pipes, D. Christian Zionism: Israel's best weapon?
22. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
23. Davidson, L. Christian Zionism and American Foreign Policy.
24. Radford Ruether, R. The Wrath of Jonah..
25. Lindsey, H. The Late Great Planet Earth.
26. Mesalha, M. and Hayes, N. Perspectives on Jerusalem.
27. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
28. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
29. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
30. Pipes, D. Christian Zionism: Israel's Best Weapon?
31. Campolo, T. The ideological roots of Christian Zionism.
32. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
33. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
34. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
35. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
36. Ata, A. W. Forgotten Christians in the Holy Land.
37. Lindsey, H. The Late Great Planet Earth.
38. Halsell, G. Forcing God's Hand.
39. Rose, J. Nation as Trauma, Zionism as a Question.
40. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
41. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
42. Mezvinsky, N. The Impact of Christian Zionism on Arab - Israeli Conflict.
43. Gorenberg, G. in Campolo, T. The ideological roots of Christian Zionism.
44. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
45. Ariel, Y. An Unexpected Alliance.
46. Gorenberg, G. The End of Days.
47. Masalha, N and Hayes, N. Perspectives on Jerusalem.
48. Masalha, N. and Hayes, N. Perspectives on Jerusalem.

49. Gorenberg, G. *The End of Days*.
50. Cook, D. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*.
51. Cook, D. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*.
52. *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*, title of the fraudulent document that served as a pretext and rationale for anti-Semitism in the early 20th century. It purports to be a report of a series of 24 (or 27) meetings held at Basel, Switzerland in 1897, at the time of the first Zionist congress. There Jews and Freemasons were said to have made plans to disrupt Christian civilization and erect a world state under their rule. The work was printed in Russia and translated into many languages. Subsequent investigations revealed that *Protocols* were forgeries composed by officials of the Russian secret police. (*British Encyclopaedia*)
53. Roy, O. *Globalized Islam*.
54. Muslims often insist that they are not racist, and, indeed, even most of the apocalyptic writers are not. They define their superiority to the rest of the world in the terms of religion rather than race. Bernard Lewis, a well-known American orientalist, acknowledges the fact: "One characteristic feature of later European Anti-Semitism was entirely lacking in Islamic world, even in the pattern of discrimination which it imposed, and that is racism. There were Christians as well as Jews in ancient Arabia, and both were seen as part of the Arab family. Judaism, like Christianity, was seen as a religion, which one might join or leave, and not as an inherent and unchangeable racial identity" (Lewis, *B.Semites and Antisemites*, 131)
55. Salim Fahd cited in Cook
56. Cook, D. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*.
57. Bashir Muhammad Abdallah cited in Cook
58. Bashir Muhammad Abdallah, cited in Cook
59. Cook, D. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*.
60. Cook, D. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*.
61. Naqšbandī order. One of the most widespread and vigorous sufi orders. In the twentieth century a branch of the order was established by Naẓīm Ḥaqqānī (born 1922 on Cyprus)
62. Damrel, D. *A Sufi Apocalypse*.
63. Damrel, D. *A Sufi Apocalypse*
64. Cook, D. *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*.
65. Damrel, D. *A Sufi Apocalypse*.

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