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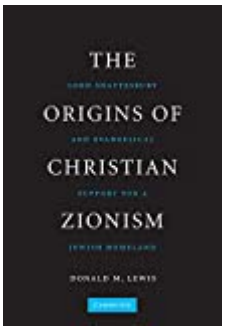

Donald M. Lewis. *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. xiii + 365 pp. $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-51518-4.

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Protecting God's Ancient People

Since the mid-1950s the most influential study of British Christian Zionism has been Barbara Tuchmanâs *Bible and Sword: England and Palestine from the Bronze Age to Balfour,* first published in 1956. Often cited approvingly by historians of Zionism and writers on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Tuchmanâs work has been criticized by historians on the left generally, and by advocates of the Palestinian cause specifically.[1]

Readers in search of a thorough and considered history of British Christian support for âthe restoration of the Jews to their landâ now have Donald Lewisâs *The Origins of Christian Zionism* to turn to. Lewis situates Christian Zionism within the context of Protestant theology and evangelical philosemitism, and that philosemitism is further contextualized by Lewis in this manner: âCentral to the argument of this book is the thesis that British evangelical interest in the Jews was part and parcel of a wider process of evangelical identity construction that took a decisive turn in the early nineteenth centuryâ (p. 12). Why then did these British thinkers identify with and seek to protect Jews in England and elsewhere? Lewis links this sense of identification to two related ideals: first, that Britain needed to live up to its sense of self as a biblical, elect nation; second, that the Jews of the time provided a âvisible historic linkâ to the biblical past (p. 13).

Lewisâs objective is clearly stated in the bookâs opening sentence: âIf we are to understand the phenomena of Christian Zionism and evangelical philosemitism we have to understand where the idea of Jewish restoration to Palestine fits in the history of Jewish and Christian thinkingâ (p. 25). Lewisâs mention of Jewish thinking is very telling. Unlike Tuchman, who assumes a self-evident Jewish consensus about political Zionism, Lewis points out that the various and somewhat contradictory statements of Christians about Zionism are âparalleled by Judaismâs own ambivalence about the place of a Jewish homeland in its theologyâ (p. 25).

In the last decade there has been a spate of books about Christian Zionism in the United States. Some of them are quite polemical (e.g., Stephen R. Sizerâs *Chris-*

tian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon? [2005]). Others are more scholarly and objective in content and tone (see Shalom Goldman, *Zeal for Zion* [2010]). These works on American Christian Zionism all acknowledge the movementâs British background, but up to now there has been no one authoritative source on that subject to turn to. Lewisâs new book provides us with it. His historical sources are the publications, personal records, diaries, and archives of the people and institutions that supported Jewish return to Palestine.

Since the publication of Tuchmanâs *Bible and Sword* scholars have tended to rely on her account of British evangelical support for Jewish restoration. Lewis takes us back to the sources and corrects some of Tuchmanâs misreadings. While Tuchmanâs 1956 book ranged over a very wide historical period (âFrom the Bronze Age to Balfourâ), Lewisâs book is sharply focused on the nineteenth century. Chapter 1, âThe Rise of British Evangelical Interest in the Jews,â covers developments in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Lewis emphasizes the importance of the French Revolution as a âkey turning point in prophetic speculationâ (p. 38). This was because âthe events of the 1790s combined to cause profound fear and dismay in English evangelical circlesâ (p. 37). A key figure in prophetic speculation was James Bicheno, whose widely read book *The Signs of the Times* (1791) predicted the end of the papacy, the restoration of the Jews to their land, and their âfulfillment as Jewish Christiansâ (p. 43). As observers of todayâs American Zionism will notice, these ideas are still current in some American evangelical circles.

Chapter 2, âShaftesbury and the Jews,â focuses on Lord Ashley, the Earl of Shaftesbury, âbest remembered as Britainâs most prominent social reformer as well as its quintessential evangelical lay leader.â Lewisâs contribution to Lord Ashleyâs story, a story already told by many historians of nineteenth-century British political life, is to show us how he became âthe leading proponent of Christian Zionism in the nineteenth century and the first politician of stature to attempt to prepare the way for Jews to establish a homeland in Palestineâ (p. 107). Lewis reminds us that Shaftesburyâs Zionism sprang from evangelical philosemitism. He and his fellow evangelicals aimed âto establish as part of British national identity a unique responsibility toward âGodâs chosen peopleââ (p. 188). A Tory member of Parliament for decades and later a member of the House of Lords, Shaftesbury was not a cabinet member and did not directly influence British foreign policy. But he was closely linked, by family and friendship, with an English statesman who had great influence in domestic and foreign affairs. This was Henry John Temple, Lord Palmerston, foreign secretary from 1830 to 1841 and prime minister from 1855 to 1865. For political reasons more than for religious reasons, Palmerston too became an advocate for Jewish restoration. Among other factors that came into play in his deliberations about British support for Jewish return was âthe view that the Jews could be useful in buttressing the collapsing Ottoman Empire, thus helping to accomplish the key object of British foreign policy in the areaâ (p. 185).

Chapter 3, âEvangelicals and Piestists Together: The Mission to Jews and Palestine,â tells a story less well known than that of Shaftesbury and Palmerston. Here Lewis breaks new ground. While previous scholarship on Christian Zionism focused solely on English religions and political concerns, Lewisâs work makes explicit the connection to movements within German Protestant life. âWhat has generally not been appreciated by historians of the Near East is the close links that the British evangelical and German Pietist movements had with each otherâ (p. 213). This German-English cooperation prepared the way for events in the late 1830s/early 1840s. In chapter 3 Lewis chronicles the very concrete results of British-German cooperation in mid nineteenth-century Palestine. While these results are known to the students of the period, no one has documented the links between the events. They are: 1) the establishment of the British Consulate in Jerusalem in 1838, where the first counsels saw themselves as protectors of the Jews of Palestine; 2) the inauguration of the Anglican Bishopric in Jerusalem, in 1841 with the appointment of Michael Solomon Alexander, a convert from Judaism; and 3) the opening near Jaffa Gate of Christ Church, the first Anglican church in Jerusalem, in 1843. Lewis makes the case that these accomplishments–each of them envisioned by Lord Shaftesbury–would not have been possible without the cooperation of the Prussian religious and political authorities.

Chapter 4, âShaftesburyâs Final Years,â actually takes us beyond Shaftesburyâs final year (1885) to 1917, the year that the British government issued the Balfour Declaration. That document described itself as a âdeclaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations.â Lewis demonstrates that in Shaftesburyâs last decade âother important voices were joining Shaftesbury in promoting Jewish restorationâ (p. 319). Among these were other influential âChristian Zionistâ members of parliament and government.

Against this background, Lewis makes the case that âboth the religious and ethnic backgrounds of the British War Cabinet (of World War One) deserve far more attention than historians have hither to givenâ (p. 332). Lewis demonstrates that this cabinet, dominated by non-English members from Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and Cape Colony (South Africa), was deeply influenced by evangelicism: âThe influence of the religious culture that had nurtured them disposed to think of the Jews as a âpeopleâ a âraceâ and âa nationâ and inclined towards the idea of a Jewish homeland.â More so, these cabinet members were influenced by the idea that âBritain had a special role in enabling this to happenâ (p. 334). Against this background, the decision to issue the Balfour Declaration and later to assume the Palestine mandate, seem as firmly linked to religious history as to diplomatic history.

Lewisâs book is a very important contribution to the study of British Christian Zionism. One suspects that it will remain the authoritative text on that subject for many years to come.

Note

[1]. See N. Mattar, âProtestantism, Palestine and Partisan Scholarship,â *The Journal of Palestinian Studies* (Summer 1989): 52-70; and for Donald Lewisâs critiques of Tuchmanâs book see Lewis, 148 and 171.