

4

US Christian Zionism

US Christian Zionism represents the most obscure and least explored amid the various constituencies that animated the project of a 'New American Empire' during the era of President George W. Bush. It may be characterized as a modern millenarian movement stemming from American conservative Evangelicalism, which advocates that the restoration of Diaspora Jews to Palestine is a necessary step in an End Time scenario in which Christ returns to rule the world for 1000 years before the Final Judgement, and that he will do so from a theocratic kingdom centred on Jerusalem.¹

In a co-written study that stirred endless polemics, political scientists John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt submitted that US Evangelical Zionism represents the Christian 'significant adjunct' to the 'Israel lobby': a loose but powerful interest group composed of both Jews and Gentiles, whose 'acknowledged purpose is to press Israel's case within the United States and influence American foreign policy in ways that its members believe will benefit the Jewish state'. This lobby would pressurize Washington leaders to treat Israel 'as if it were the fifty-first state of the Confederation'. Although the authors refrain from defining the Israel lobby as a cabal or a conspiracy, they nonetheless recognize in its political prominence, remit and dedication the underlying cause for America's unwavering and unconditional support of the Zionist state in the past 40 years:

Since the Six-Day War, a salient feature – and arguably the central focus – of America's Middle East policy has been its relationship with Israel. For the past four decades, in fact, the United States has provided Israel with a level of material and diplomatic support that dwarfs what it provided to other countries. That aid is largely

unconditional: no matter what Israel does, the level of support remains for the most part unchanged. In particular, the United States consistently favours Israel over the Palestinians and rarely puts pressure on the Jewish state to stop building settlements and roads in the West Bank. ... Even when American presidents put pressure on Israel to make concessions or try to distance the United States from Israel's policies – as President George W. Bush has attempted to do on several occasions since September 11 – the lobby intervenes and brings them into line.²

Pastor Stephen Sizer, today one of Christian Zionism's most vehement critics, charges that Evangelical organizations and individuals inspired by this millenarian faith comprise 'what is probably the most powerful lobby in the US, influencing not only American foreign policy but also the chances of a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict'. To Sizer, conservative Evangelicals adhering to this End Time creed would be even more dedicated than the majority of Jewish interest groups in providing political, financial and moral support to modern Israel. Further, US Christian Zionists would vote disproportionately for the Republican Party and maintain significant links with the neoconservative elites. Until the November 2008 presidential election, the pastor adds, there were no doubt several prominent born-again Christians inside the White House (including Bush himself) who embraced, or at least sympathized with, this particular millenarian orientation.³

On a more cautionary note, other experts contend that the Evangelical right's weight within the Israel lobby should not be overstated, nor its overall influence on the White House. Especially when compared to established Jewish pressure groups like the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Anti-Defamation League (ADL) or Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), Christian Zionist lobbies still lack 'the organizational capacity to analyze national security topics or to offer specific legislative guidance on concrete foreign policy issues'.⁴ For these reasons alone, Evangelical Zionism should be seen as a 'junior partner' to the Israel lobby and not as its driving force, which, according to the majority of commentators, would indisputably stem from the Jewish neoconservative core. The same considerations might apply to Christian Zionism's demographic strength in the US. Quite tellingly, supporters as well as detractors equally overinflate the number of Christian millenarian supporters of Israel to at least 50 million. More accurate and reliable estimates assess the current proportion of Christian Zionists to be composed of 20 to 25 per cent of the 85 to 90 million

American Evangelicals. This would mean that Christian Zionists amass about 6.4 per cent of the overall United States population that today stands at 315 million.⁵

As John Hubers reminds us, not buying into the figures that Christian Zionist leaders boast in order 'to puff their sense of self-importance' is essential to avoiding the recurrent misconception that all American Evangelicals are on board with the extremist End Time views underpinning such a theo-political movement.⁶ Despite representing the largest, fastest growing and most politically active component of US religious life, Evangelicalism is far from being a monolithic entity. Rather, it should be understood as a 'galaxy in perpetual motion', formed by groups, denominations and churches that, whilst sharing common cultural traits and doctrinal dogmas, remain nevertheless divided or in controversy over many other key theological issues.⁷ Defining a religious belonging whilst discriminating within its multiple facets is never an easy task to accomplish. This appears particularly to be the case in regards to the religious background of the case study presented here:

[All American] Evangelicals are so individualistic and diverse that it is hard even to identify and count them, much less to define their theology or measure their political convictions definitively. There is no agreement about how many Evangelicals there are in America, in part because there is no single comprehensive definition of who they are or what they believe. One should not think of Evangelicalism as a single vessel majestically transporting a unified community of believers to political domination, social redemption, and eternal salvation. Rather, it is like a vast fleet of rowboats and boogie boards, each bearing an individual in search of an authentic personal experience with God.⁸

In keeping with the taxonomic guidelines provided by John Green, a prominent demographer and expert on the impact of religion on American public life, US Christian Zionism would be embedded in the subculture of a conservative type of Evangelicalism, often called 'fundamentalism'.⁹ Sociologically speaking, the term was firstly deployed to define that faith-based countercultural movement against the secularist tendencies emerging in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. For our purposes here it is essential to note that this religious form of anti-modernism propounds, as its doctrinal basis, the principle of perfect biblical inerrancy paired with premillennial dispensational eschatology. The latter consists of a kind of apocalypticism fastening

on the utopian hope that the founding of the Zionist state and the Jewish ingathering in Eretz Yisrael signals the imminent irruption of the Kingdom of God on earth.

The fate of modern Israel is nonetheless a defining theological issue not exclusively for this conservative sector of the Evangelical population. As Timothy Weber points out, in spite of the fact that 'only a third of American Evangelicals would identify with dispensational world-views', many more Evangelical Bible believers, 'have a very warm spot in their heart for Israel. Let's face it. Evangelicals grew up with maps of Israel on their Sunday school wall!'¹⁰ It will be shown that, as a result of the September 11 aftershock, an Israel-centred kind of millenarian faith acquired momentum not only within the dispensationalist circles, but also in US Evangelicalism at large.

Even though it seems impossible to ascertain Christian Zionism's exact demographics or the extent of its influence on Washington's decision-making, it remains nonetheless necessary to study this phenomenon as it represents, along with Israeli Religious Zionism, another indicative example of how eschatological beliefs impact on political reality, both on a domestic and international scale. For these conservative Evangelicals, 'politics and prophecy-based faith are inseparable: not only do current events in the Middle East confirm the Word of God, but also reiterate biblical events'.¹¹ The injunctions and promises concerning the ancient tribes of Israel are therefore applied to the contemporary Zionist state. In light of an unconditional reading of the Covenant, Israel would be legitimately entitled to expand its national borders to meet those defining Eretz Yisrael, as recounted in Genesis 15:18. Relying on the same scriptural sources and literal hermeneutics, US Christian Zionism sides with Gush Emunim in advocating an Israeli annexation far beyond the currently Occupied Territories. God Himself would call for a Jewish dominion over all the 'Promised Land', which includes the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Golan Heights as well as large parts of present-day Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan.

According to Evangelical Pastor John Hagee, today one of the most influential Christian Zionist leaders, a Jewish repossession of these territorial assets is seen as indispensable to preparing the way for the Second Coming of Jesus and the establishment of his Millenarian rule. Any diplomatic negotiation towards a two-state solution is thus not 'biblically sound', in that it would hamper God's geopolitical plan for the Middle East. Israel being 'the only nation the Almighty ever established', adds Hagee, the Palestinians can make no claim whatsoever to her land.¹² Considering the political visibility that US Evangelical Zionism acquired

during the eight years of the past Republican administration, al-Qaeda's ambition for the establishment of a worldwide Islamic Caliphate was directly mirrored by the utopian desire for a Jewish maximalist colonization of the Middle East.

Some not apologetic and reliable commentators explain the Evangelical 'bedrock support' for modern Israel beyond or away from End Time theology. In a balanced, nuanced and thoroughly researched study, Stephen Spector unveils a 'complex set of motivations' behind the Evangelical love for the Zionist cause. This would include guilt and contrition for Christianity's past collusion with anti-Semitism. With their unconditional love for Israel, US Evangelicals cast themselves as those 'righteous Christians' making amends for the sins of their European co-religionists who let the Holocaust happen. Evangelicals are also grateful to the Chosen for having laid the religious foundation of their faith. Without them, they would have neither the Bible nor a rabbi named 'Jesus'. Further, in view of the divine promise to Abraham contained in Genesis 12 ('I will bless those that bless you and will curse those that curse you'), Evangelicals are deeply concerned about being judged by God according to how they behaved towards His people.¹³

Accounting for the affiliation between the American Bible Belt and Israel on a not too dissimilar ground, diplomatic expert Aaron David Miller downplays the End Time theology's bearing in favour of the 'Judeo-Christian civilization' inspired by the 'good values' of democracy and freedom, one that today Israel and America would share and defend against the mounting tide of radical Islam – in particular Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah. The Zionist state would be the only friendly democracy in a 'bad neighborhood', the frontline of defence against an ominous enemy that has also the West in its sight.¹⁴

Analogous views seem to be unanimously held by all those Jewish interest groups that accept or even nurture the Evangelical support for the Zionist cause. George W. Mamo, the vice president and spokesman of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, discredits the idea that US Evangelicals support Israel in order to help summon the Second Coming. Mamo substantiates his claim with the results of an opinion poll:

We are told that the Evangelical Right supports Israel to hasten the return of Jesus and the onset of Armageddon – yet the Tarrance survey data show that only one in three Evangelicals supports Israel because it is the place prophesized for the Second Coming of Jesus. What is the most often cited reason Christians support Israel? 43 percent said

they support Israel because of Israel's democratic values and its role as our strong and reliable ally in the war against terrorism. In other words, four in ten self-identified Evangelicals support Israel because of our shared democratic values and the common enemy that is targeting America and Western values along with Israel.¹⁵

The analytical perspective embraced here is quite different: however important these non-eschatological drives might be, in order to unveil the underlying motives at the base of the political, financial and moral support this mass Evangelical constituency offers to the Zionist enterprise, it is necessary to pay close attention to its millenarian underpinning. US Christian Zionists are prophecy-believers scrutinizing the horizon of historical occurrences through the lens of an End Time 'jigsaw', one that has been idiosyncratically assembled from selected apocalyptic passages disseminated in the Old and New Testaments.¹⁶ Once interpreted from a literal-inerrant hermeneutical standpoint, these key passages are seen as no less than 'pre-written history', containing a detailed and discernable timetable for the end of the present dispensation and the beginning of a no longer perfectible age of bliss and harmony.

During a visit to Jordan, Israel and Palestine that he made in February 2010, then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams was reported as saying that Christian Zionism's theology represents a 'recent Protestant addition' devoid of any substantial 'biblical base'. According to Williams, the belief by some US conservative Evangelicals that the foundation and the territorial expansion of the Israeli state is a prerequisite for the return of Christ appeared as a consequence of some prophecy-driven speculations being made only in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Notwithstanding Williams' remarks about its recent vintage, it seems undeniable that, as a belief system, Christian Zionism shows profound affinity and continuity with long-established ideals and tropes inscribed in the apocalyptic tradition. Beyond the caricatures of 'mentally unhinged' fundamentalists ushering in the end of the world, stands a complex set of convictions and practices soothing present-day spiritual needs and existential anxieties. When one confronts a millenarian creed that today gathers millions of believers and also impinges on key geopolitical realities such as the Middle East peace processes, simplistic stereotype and sensationalist exposés should be abandoned in favour of a serious and critical engagement with the sources of such a consensus. The main purpose of this chapter is therefore to repeat the exercise done in the previous one. An attempt will here be made to define US Christian Zionism theologically, in order to tease out and

unpack the core motives from which its earthly involvement stems. It will be argued that in order to understand the Evangelical dedication to the Zionist cause, one should never dissociate God's special relationship with his Chosen from the eschatological calculations about the catastrophic irruption of a final and ultimate age of perfection and harmony. The promises made to Abraham and his descendants in Genesis and the visions of the End summoned by John's Apocalypse are the two pillars on which premillennial dispensationalism rests, however the former are subordinated to the latter. Our underlying assumption is that if the opposite were true, most of the dispensationalist appeal over US Evangelicals would wither away.

Dispensationalism

US Christian Zionism is embedded in a theological framework known as premillennial dispensationalism, by far the most influential apocalyptic belief system in contemporary America. As previously explained, premillennialism is a shorthand for a catastrophic understanding of the Christian redemptive process holding that Jesus Christ's return in glory will precede and actually inaugurate the 1000-year period of peace, bliss and holiness. Dispensationalism is one of the multiple variations of the premillennial template, developed during the nineteenth century by the Anglo-Irish Evangelist John Nelson Darby, a member of the Plymouth Brethren sect in Dublin. As his charismatic authority was waning in Britain, Darby decided to undertake several 'preaching tours' in North America, where he met and influenced such prominent Evangelical leaders as Dwight Moody and William Blackstone. Darby soon became a leading figure in the Bible and Prophecy Conference movement, a theological circle that, between 1875 and 1920, would set the doctrinal tone for the emerging fundamentalist movement in North America. Dispensationalism could not have attained its mass popularity in the US without the mediation of Cyrus Scofield, a Kansas theologian, minister and attorney fascinated by Darby's speculations about the Jews' prophetic role. In 1909, Scofield published through the Oxford University Press an annotated Bible with the intent of helping readers to understand the Old and New Testamentarian prophecies from a dispensationalist angle. In the following years, his book was sold by the millions, elevating Scofield to the status of 'ultimate authority, the final court of Biblical hermeneutics'. Today, many Evangelical Zionists regard the Scofield Reference Bible not as a commentary informed by Darby's futurist eschatology, but as the Christian canon itself.¹⁸

Dispensationalism does not represent a mere derivation from premillennial eschatology. Rather, it should be seen as an all-encompassing belief system, which blends together 'a Biblical hermeneutics, a philosophy of history and a fairly comprehensive systematic theology'.¹⁹ For our purpose here, the crux of Darby's intricate doctrine is recapitulated as follows. The entire sacred history, beginning with Creation and ending with Christ's Millennial Kingdom, unfolds according to a preordained plan, which is divided chronologically by seven 'dispensations', that is, distinct epochs marked off by precise temporal limits and something peculiar to each. In each and every one of these dispensations, God offers to a fallen humanity what Scofield calls a 'new means of grace': a chance to redeem itself and in so doing advance the overall process of salvation. Each time, however, humankind fails to live in obedience to the test. As God executes His chastisement, the present dispensation is brought to a closure and a new one begins. By establishing a set of binding Covenants with them, God originally appoints the Jews as 'chosen agents' of such a redemptive process. But, throughout its long history Israel falls repeatedly short of fulfilling its agreement with God. On account of their unfaithfulness and disobedience, punishment is visited upon the Israelites in the form of foreign oppression, loss of national independence and exilic subjugation.

The real turning point in Darby's sacred chronology takes place 483 years after the end of the Babylonian captivity and the Jewish second restoration to Israel. God sends His Son to save Israel from the Roman domination and re-establish the House of David as everlasting monarchy, but the Pharisees (the forefathers of Rabbinic Judaism) rejected Christ as their Messiah, allowing the Roman authorities to crucify him. As a result of the serious shortcoming, the cosmic plan of salvation centred on Israel is completely subverted. God suspends the prophetic timetable, chastises the Jews once more with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and a new exile, while temporally transferring His attention to the just formed Christian Church. Now, in the sixth dispensation preceding the Millennium, the chance of redemption comes only to 'those who accept Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their personal saviour'. It is crucial to keep in mind that the reshuffle does not entail the Christian supersession of Israel. God's promises to Abraham as recounted in Genesis remain unconditional and eternal and the Age of the Church represents a sheer historical 'parenthesis', which will expire with the Jewish ultimate restoration to the Holy Land. In keeping with Darby's intricate script, the ingathering of the exiles and the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine would instantiate that eschatological

chain reaction, leading directly to the return of Jesus and his ensuing 1000-year reign. In other words, for King Jesus to rule the world from David's throne in Jerusalem, it is necessary that the Jewish people fulfil their part of the Covenant with God. From this eschatological scenario it follows that the Christian salvation rests entirely on the fate of the Jewish people and their return to the Land of Inheritance. Everything on the Christian Zionist mind rides on the Jews.²⁰

The cult of the text

In view of the distinctive emphasis that Martin Luther placed on 'sola scriptura', the cult of the sacred text has always been to some significant extent implicit in Reformed Christianity. As Carl G. Jung put it, having pulled down many normative frameworks, liturgies and rituals that Roman Catholicism had erected over the centuries, Protestantism was immediately confronted with the 'schismatic and disintegrating effect of individual revelation'. Once 'left to God alone', and without the protection or guidance of traditional dogmas, believers were thus obliged to intensify the authority of the Bible as a substitute for 'the lost authority of the Church'. That the truths of Christian faith and practice can and must be deduced from the Scripture alone, added Jung, entails 'a chance of immediate spiritual experience with God', but also 'a great risk'.²¹

The espousal of a literal system of biblical interpretation is often recognized as the doctrinal hallmark of Darby's doctrine. Scofield charged that premillennial dispensationalism was the result of 'consistent application of the basic hermeneutical principle of literal or plain interpretation. No other system of theology can claim this. The non-literalist is the non-Dispensationalist, [whereas] the consistent literalist is a Dispensationalist.'²² Akin to the adherents of other fundamentalist viewpoints, past and present dispensationalist expositors reject any allegorical or mythological meaning bestowed on the sacred text that they revere. The latter must consistently be taken at its 'face value', that is, by giving to every word 'the same meaning it would have in normal usage, whether employed in writing, speaking or thinking'.²³

As a self-standing interpretative principle, however, literalism may not be methodologically sound, first of all in view of that 'absurd lack of proportion between the claims that are religiously important to Fundamentalists and the arguments about the sacred scriptures by which they seek to guarantee the veracity of those claims'.²⁴ Further, that the Old and New Testaments are fraught with countless contradictions, anomalies and overlapping 'doublets' would render it impossible

to enshrine a coherent meaning of the Word of God on literal grounds alone. On this ground, biblical scholar James Barr submits that the dependable and guiding principle to all conservative Evangelical hermeneutics, the one that overrides all other principles whilst dictating the overarching approach to the Bible is not literalism but rather inerrancy. What really matters is that, in view of its divine authorship, the Bible contains only 'axiomatic and fundamental truths', not only theologically but also in historical, geographical, chronological or scientific terms. No actual instances of error can be contemplated because even the smallest of them might put at risk the inspiration and authority of the whole:

Even if Fundamentalists sometimes say that they take the Bible literally, the facts of their interpretation show that this is not so. What Fundamentalists insist on is not that the Bible must be taken literally but that it must be so interpreted as to avoid any admission that it contains any kind of error. In order to avoid imputing errors to the Bible, Fundamentalists twist and turn back and forward between literal and non-literal interpretation. ... What they mean is that the Bible is error-free.²⁵

Commenting on Barr's ideas, Malise Ruthven charges that by means of the doctrine of inerrancy, fundamentalists are able to 'iron out' those textual anomalies or inconsistencies that readily arise from the application of literal hermeneutics. Whenever their scriptural interpretations are contradicted by historical evidence or established knowledge, fundamentalists avoid embarrassment – and also resist criticism by the hand of more progressive theologians – by shifting the ground away from literalism and towards inerrancy. Here, 'the burden of proof' is entirely transposed from God to man. Once the Bible is taken as God's infallible statement, it follows that its discrepancies must be explained as shortcomings in human understanding and not as flaws inherent in the text itself. Moving back and forth between literalism and inerrancy affords Christian fundamentalists the possibility to endow their idiosyncratic readings of the Bible with a patina of almost scientific authenticity.²⁶ Within conservative Evangelical circles, this hermeneutical criterion is frequently endorsed as the 'fighting word' against the outer and unfaithful world, but also functions as a 'litmus test' for in-group belonging. As such, it may be deployed as a 'loyalty oath' for membership in Evangelical congregations or feature in the statutes of various church organizations.²⁷

Literalism finessed by inerrancy is essential to premillennial dispensationalists as it provides the basis for satisfying their obsessive interest in 'understanding the times' for the sake of setting forth that chain of events leading towards the Apocalyptic transfiguration. The impetus for decoding the 'chronology of the End' out of selected biblical passages is a long-standing millenarian rationale, which continues today in that popular variety of 'fictionalized' dispensationalism represented by *The Late Great Planet Earth* or *Left Behind Series*. Within those circles it is commonly held that, if properly interpreted, the sacred text can unveil 'a detailed road map of events that will soon unfold as human history enters in its final stage'.²⁸

A rekindled commitment to the authority of Bible, along with the conviction that its prophecies are pre-written history, are often seen by historians as being part of that anti-modernist crusade that US conservative Evangelicalism waged against Darwin's evolutionist theories between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. Under this light, the embrace of literal-inerrant hermeneutics would primarily represent a countercultural reaction to the allegorizing and spiritualizing exegeses imbuing Higher Criticism. This method of progressive biblical interpretation first emerged in the wake of the shift in epistemological paradigms engendered by the European Enlightenment, to acquire later, at the end of the eighteenth century, its fully fledged status within the area of German liberal Protestantism. Higher Criticism reads the sacred Scriptures through the lens of human history, rather than reading the latter through the prism of the former, as dispensationalism sets out to do. The sacred text is to be investigated 'rationally' as a bare cultural document like any other – that is, without any doctrinal restriction and by utilizing all the linguistic, archaeological and historical data available. This method posits that, consisting of distinct strata added and edited over time, the Bible is to be studied 'diachronically', through a detailed analysis of the various socio-historical contexts in which it was written. On these grounds, its apocalyptic-prophetic contents should be reevaluated either as 'inspirational poetry' crafted to sustain persecuted communities or in the guise of *vaticinia ex eventu* (prophecies of the past) – retrospective interpretations of already occurred events, which are recast in the guise of future predictions in order to legitimize a known outcome.

Needless to say, the supposedly value-free and scientifically objective methods of Higher Criticism represented a frontal attack at the core of conservative Christian identity, beliefs and values. In order to secure the basic assumptions of their worldview from the encroachment of

modernity and its degenerative ideas, a coterie of Evangelical clergymen launched in 1875 the Niagara Bible Conference. This annual summer resort symposium set the precedent for countless other Bible conferences throughout North America. By 1878, the countercultural revivalist movement had unanimously identified 14 'Fundamentals', amongst which Darby's eschatological system was officially included as the doctrinal tenet of the most recent vintage. A 'sectarian novelty' such as premillennial dispensationalism was thus enshrined as 'fundamental' to Evangelical orthodoxy as Christ's incarnation, the Virgin Birth, the working power of miracles or the Resurrection.

In view of the remarkable success of the Scofield Reference Bible, whose publication coincided with the heyday of the revivalist movement, Darby's doctrine became 'grafted' onto Evangelical Orthodoxy. Espousing the word of God through its plain meaning, referring to doctrinal inerrancy whenever such a plain meaning conflicts with reality, and reading current affairs through the lens of a highly periodized, deterministic and pessimistic eschatology became the theological bedrock of the nascent fundamentalist culture – a culture of which Christian Zionism represents today as the most politically salient offspring. As Gary Dorrien contends, the rise of dispensationalist theology was responsible for a steep decline in critical biblical literacy within American Protestantism, in turn leading to a weakening of key spiritual and ethical resources belonging to that religious tradition:

Instead of reading scripture inductively in its historical and canonical contexts, Dispensationalists fixed on a few Apocalyptic texts ripped out of context and applied literally to the future. In the name of recovering fundamental full-gospel Christianity, they promoted bad exegesis and displaced the Biblical doctrine of salvation with a bizarre schematism only remotely derived from the scripture.²⁹

It should not be forgotten that dispensational hermeneutics acquired authoritative ground within US Evangelical circles after key prophetic claims that Darby made about the Jews' restoration to the Land and the founding of a Jewish national home in Palestine appeared to have been miraculously fulfilled. The early successes of the Zionist movement did more than validate the standing of the Bible as divinely revealed truth. They bestowed credibility on other not yet fulfilled predictions announcing that imminent global catastrophe ushering in the Second Coming of Jesus and his Millenarian rule centred in Jerusalem. How

such a mutual reinforcement between End Time expectations and historical occurrences concerning modern Israel feeds into the political mobilization of Christian Zionism will be addressed further on.

The strength of Darby's belief system stems from a 'self-contained doctrinal package allowing no additions or subtractions'.³⁰ This package is nothing but a compound of heterogeneous and often unrelated passages drawn selectively from Daniel, Ezekiel, Revelation or other apocalyptic verses scattered in the Old and New Testaments. Dispensationalists deploy the 'jigsaw puzzle' as an interpretative prism, to put past and present historical events into meaningful relation with each other and, in so doing, cast light on how the future will unfold.

More progressive voices within American Evangelicalism and Judaism tend to epitomize Darby's doctrine as a highly confected theology, derived from a 'pick-and-choose hermeneutics' and without any authoritative biblical grounding. Endorsing arguments that evoke the basics of Higher Criticism, New Testament scholar Barbara Rossing argues that dispensationalism assembles with utter impunity 'bits and pieces of Christian canon written many centuries apart and under very different socio-historical circumstances into an overarching End Time formula'.³¹ On a similar wavelength, Rabbi Michael Cook, an expert in Jewish-Christian relations, accuses Darby's doctrine of intermingling 'biblical materials from hither and yon that bear no intrinsic relation to one another, and that even individually are not understood correctly – all to construct an elaborately bizarre theological system reliant on no solid foundation whatsoever'.³² Craig Hill, another liberal Evangelical theologian lined up against the alleged Christian Zionist 'distortions', charges that:

ironically, in their effort to interpret the Bible literally and consistently, proponents of Dispensational theology have mangled the biblical witness almost beyond recognition. It is the Bible itself, this wonderfully diverse and complex witness to God and Christ, that has been 'left behind'.³³

What all these criticisms seem to underestimate is, to a significant extent, dispensationalism's major strength, one proved by the evidence that over its 100-year existence, Darby's 'hotchpotch' has shown itself as remarkably flexible and adaptable to change. This, observes O'Leary, often happens as a result of a twofold process. The acolytes of Darbite eschatology are prone to distort the import of historical occurrences in order to fit the prophecy and, in case this operation is not pursuable,

they are equally capable of twisting the prophecy in order to accommodate reality:

like the hypochondriac poring over a medical textbook who constantly finds his own ailments mirrored in the symptoms of every rare disease, [the dispensationalist] interpreter who searches the world around him for Apocalyptic signs of the times is likely to find that for which he seeks.³⁴

That the appeal of its predictions withstood several disconfirmations further confirms dispensationalism as an enduring and powerful millenarian creed, particularly capable of granting believers unity of meaning and reassurance in times of trials and tribulations.

Dual Covenant

At the heart of Darby's doctrine stands the idea of 'an almost apartheid-like separation' between Israel and the Church.³⁵ God has two distinct but parallel means of working towards eternity, one through the heirs of the Jewish tribes whom He originally appointed as His Chosen, and the other through those who have already accepted Jesus as their saviour. In all its historical variations, dispensationalism adamantly rejects the so-called 'replacement theology': a post-apostolic contention maintaining that the Church and its members have superseded Israel as new Covenantal people or, otherwise put, that the promises that God had originally made to the Israelites are now fulfilled in and through the Church. According to all dispensationalists alike, Christianity is neither the culmination of God's activity in the Old Testament, nor the novel 'light to the nations' whose coming was already foretold by the Hebrew prophets. To them, Israel indisputably refers to those physical descendants of Abraham who continue to be entrusted with a mission of cosmic redemption.³⁶

Rather than a 'spiritualized Israel', the Church represents a 'great parenthesis', a temporary interruption in the divine programme of salvation, resulting from the Jewish failure to recognize Jesus as their saviour. As previously mentioned, this failure caused God to halt the prophetic clock and reshuffle His plans. The 'prophetic time warp' represented by the Church's age, however, does not spell the end of God's love for His Chosen. Nor does it abrogate His Covenantal promises to them. When the current Church's parenthesis lapses on earth (an imminent event according to Darby), God will resume the Israelite dispensation and

bring it to its completion. At that time, the Jews will be once again be offered a chance to accept their 'true' Messiah. Such an event will signal the 'fullness of time' with the irruption of that 'glorious era of peace and righteousness known as the Millennium'.³⁷ A major inconsistency flawing the logic of Darby's argument is in the paradox of an omnipotent and omniscient God who is forced to alter His cosmic design as a result of a 'distraction' on the part of His Chosen.³⁸

Israel and the Church are to be kept separate, insofar as they are the focus of two different stages of prophetic fulfilment, the 'earthly' and the 'heavenly'. Dispensationalists distinctively assert that Judaism is a mundane entity with certain earthly political expectations and objectives to attend to – namely, the repossession of the Promised Land, the reinstitution of a Davidic Kingdom with full sovereignty over Eretz Yisrael and the reintroduction of sacrificial rituals in a rebuilt Third Temple. The Church instead belongs and will soon return to an extramundane realm, to live in close connection with God. In keeping with the logic of this eschatological script, Christianity's status would appear to be subordinated to that of Israel and not the other way around, as it could be argued from a supersessionist angle. Within many US Evangelical congregations, it is recurrently held that the Christians' primary duty is to 'bless Israel' because neither the Gospels nor the Church would have come into existence unless the Jews had fallen into 'unbelief' by allowing Jesus to be crucified. But a further level of Evangelical involvement in favour of the Zionist cause is justified in light of the role that the Jewish people would play 'intra-historically' to expedite the Christian ascension to heaven.

Restorationism

The belief that a Jewish restoration to Palestine is the harbinger of Christian salvation predates dispensationalism, stretching back at least to Oliver Cromwell's England. It is nevertheless only within Darby's End Time scenarios that such a belief reaches its full-blown theological systematization. From the Dual Covenant logic flows that the Church, rather than being designed to supersede the earthly Israel, must attend to a precise responsibility towards her. For Darby and his acolytes, it is a primary Christian obligation to 'bless' Israel, namely by assisting the Jews in regaining the fullness of their God-appointed territorial inheritance in Palestine.

On the satisfaction of this religious duty depends the Evangelical transition from present deficiency to millenarian fulfilment – to be

exact, the Church's ascension to the heavenly status that is compounded, as will be shown in the following pages, with the moment of the Rapture. Without any precedent in Christian theology, argues Sizer, dispensationalists go as far as equating the 'restoration ministry' to the apostolic commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world:

In the same sense that the first apostles were commissioned by the Lord to be his witnesses from Jerusalem to the uttermost parts of the earth, [Evangelical Zionists] feel compelled to proclaim the word of Israel's restoration to every country and in every place where there are Christian believers.³⁹

Even at a cursory level, it is impossible not to notice a fateful convergence between US Evangelical Zionism and Israeli Religious Zionism. Despite unbridgeable theological differences, the two theo-political projects read the physical ingathering of the exiles in Palestine as the dawn of a messianic-millenarian era that has been foreordained by God Himself. For both movements alike, key soteriological goals command a precise earthly commitment.

One should also keep in mind that, in both cases, a Jewish exclusive and perpetual repossession of the Land is a law of historical necessity stemming from an unconditional reading of the heavenly promises to Israel. As previously explained, in its early formulations the Covenant enshrines an almost unrestricted entitlement to Eretz Yisrael; whereas, by the time Moses reinstates the 'berit' at Sinai, the Israelites are warned that their right to the Land remains strictly contingent on their faithfulness to the Torah. Donald Wagner, a Christian theologian who opposes the 'joint enterprise' between US Evangelicals and national religious Israelis, quotes this last reading to contend that the Land belongs to God alone and it is not at Israel's disposal. Once the Covenant is interpreted in light of its Mosaic reformulation, Eretz Yisrael would not be 'an end to itself' but, rather, 'an instrument' whereby the Chosen fulfil their religious calling. Accordingly, the Jews must relate to the Land as if they were mere 'tenants' or 'caretakers' whose occupancy is conditional on them living under the requirements of the Law. In addition to the injunctions to purity and holiness, the Law also outlines clear obligations to practice justice and not to abuse non-Jewish 'sojourners'.

In view of the eschatological import attached to a Jewish presence in Judea, Samaria and beyond, US Evangelical Zionists invariably tend to negate or minimize such terms of conditionality. In that way, they

augment the Religious Zionist approach to Eretz Yisrael as an object of religious yearning whose 'liberation' from non-Jewish hands is tantamount to salvation. Despite radical differences in their respective eschatological outlooks, the two movements align in believing that redemption will come only when Israel settles the whole Land. Quite tellingly, they rely on the same biblical passages featuring unrestrained Covenantal rights to bestow a gloss of sacredness on the settlement project in the Occupied Territories. With their single-minded focus on the Judaization of the West Bank, Religious Zionists along with their Evangelical counterparts elevate the import of the Land over that of the spiritual relationship with God. In Wagner's view, whenever Eretz Yisrael becomes an object of devotion, the Chosen fall into idolatry. By considering the Land as a 'goal' in itself and not as 'means' to realize their Covenantal duties, the Jews would attribute absolute value to that which is not absolute. In particular, they would act towards a representation of God as if it was God. Wagner adds that this major sin, in addition to the lack of humane treatment for the non-Jewish sojourner, might cause Israel divine punishment in the form of a new exile rather than a messianic restoration.⁴⁰

However well-intentioned to promote peace Wagner might be, his argument seems fraught with a sense of 'righteous innocence'. As Reverend Robert Smith observes, whenever 'Christians begin travelling down lines of thought which argue that Jews should again be removed from the Land because they have failed to properly observe the Torah or its demands of justice, Jews might understandably become quite nervous and irritated.' Christians, continues Smith, ought to engage the question concerning Jewish alleged violations against Palestinians' rights with humility. In particular, they should keep in mind that 'Christian tradition of theological anti-Judaism and historical legacy of murderous anti-Semitism', two factors that no doubt contributed to 'the founding of Israel as a modern nation-state and the subsequent displacement of millions of Palestinians'.⁴¹

Purging Eretz Yisrael

Evangelical Zionism aligns with its Jewish messianic counterpart in a further crucial respect: the problems stemming from the Arab presence on the sacred soil of Eretz Yisrael are addressed through the lens of strikingly similar ancestral slogans, dogmas or invocations and therefore seem to be the political solutions. Within the imagery of the two movements,

a mythical past inscribed in the Old Testament is called on to make the 'state of things' in Palestine appear as foreordained and immutable.

Myth should be understood here following Bruce Lincoln's suggestion: not in a pejorative sense, as a false or arbitrary story, but in the guise of something regarded by its proponents as 'a paradigmatic and unquestionable truth'. Insofar as Evangelical and Jewish Religious Zionism are concerned, the instrumentality of the biblical tradition – or, more precisely, of highly discriminating interpretations of it – is twofold. On the one hand, the obsessive repetition of the same authoritative truths enables the two religious communities to reproduce their identity in the accustomed forms; on the other, such a recitation is also strategically deployed to deprive contending narratives or claims of their own authority.⁴²

Once it escalates towards exclusionary thinking, this process of delegitimization of the 'other side' seems to become essential in the pursuit of the respective Christian and Jewish eschatological goals. To achieve wondrous salvation in the final age, argues Ravitzky, it is necessary to search for 'a blemish that is clearly visible and that may be addressed as the source of all trouble and infirmity'. For all the problems that beset us to be solved, 'that blemish must be cleansed'.⁴³

In his ethnographic study about the settlers' movement, Fiege observes that in recent years two opposing dynamics have been taking place in Israel's wider society. While for the majority of secular Jews the Arabs have increasingly turned from threatening enemies into potential negotiation partners, the Gush Emunim settlers have done their utmost to perpetuate their status of 'ultimate others'. According to Fiege, this process is far from being 'unilinear' as the surge of Arab terrorism especially after the Second Intifada has reawoken 'primeval fears' in all Israelis, religious and secular alike. This notwithstanding, attention should be drawn to the fact that, rather than framing the 'non-Jewish issue' through the legal categories of the state, national religious activists obstinately place both Arab Israelis and Palestinians within the status of 'gerim' – a Halakhic shorthand for 'resident aliens'.⁴⁴

As the leading school of Religious Zionist thought, the Merkaz Harav overtly states that 'the non-Jewish residents are to be treated by the people of Israel with tolerance and respect but no more'. The principle of national self-determination and universal human rights are not normatively binding in dealings with the Arabs, because such principles are subordinated to the biblical injunction that 'the Land of Israel belongs to the Jews alone'. This sacred postulate has 'definite implications' that ought to inform present-day policies towards the 'Palestinian problem'.

All the Arabs either living within the Green Line or in Judea and Samaria therefore would be confronted with three alternatives, being:

(1) To acknowledge publicly the legitimacy of the Zionist doctrine (or better, the Gush Emunim's version of it), and to receive full civil rights, including the right to elect and be elected to the Knesset and serve in the army; (2) to obey the laws of the state without formal recognition of Zionism and be in return granted full rights of resident aliens (but not political rights); or (3) to be offered economic incentives to immigrate to Arab countries.⁴⁵

As outlined in the previous chapter, as far as Kookism is concerned, democratic norms, principles and values do not hold in the case of Israel because they are nothing but corrupting offsprings of that Western culture alienating the Chosen from their redemptive task.

The actualization of the 'Jewish law of destiny' through the conquest and settlement of Eretz Yisrael overrides any ethical consideration for the Gentiles who reside on its sacred soil. Rabbi Shlomo Aviner reminds his audience that:

Israel was commanded in the Torah that 'thou shalt be holy', but [it was] not commanded to be moral; and the general codes of morality which have been accepted by mankind, in principle at least, do not commit the Jew, for he was chosen to be beyond them.⁴⁶

It follows that resident aliens may live in the Land as long as they do not oppose in any form or fashion its Judaization, namely with their demands for national self-determination. An Arab who advances such a claim, adds Rabbi Aviner, 'is neither a Palestinian nationalist nor a proud patriot; he is not even deluded. He is simply a liar because he, along with all his compatriots, knows that the Arabs hold no rights to Eretz Yisrael.'⁴⁷

Rabbi Zvi Tau, today one of the most prominent figures within Religious Zionism, describes the Israeli-Palestinian dispute as a modern rendition of the ancient struggle of the Israelites opposing the Philistines, one of Israel's biblical enemies. Drawing on evocative precedents in Hebrew lore augments the rabbi's claim about the intrinsically different stature of the two contenders:

The Philistines are the absolute contrast to Israel's course of life. Theirs is a semblance of nationality. They masquerade as a people, they

cloak themselves with all the national features – and yet they lack any essence, any content of their own. The Philistines have no value, role or hidden talent that is required to complete the form of humanity, nor do they have any foothold in eternity, as do the Jewish people, whose nationality is connected with the divine plan of restoring the world and making all creatures achieve their true purpose.

Now as then, Tau adds, ‘Ahmed’ and ‘Mustafa’ pretend to have a collective identity as a nation, but only as an excuse to steal the Land from the Jews, and in that way forestall their mission of cosmic redemption.⁴⁸

Overwhelmingly, US Christian Zionists side with these Jewish exclusivist positions. For the sake of staying true to the divine plan, the Chosen cannot be governed by ordinary norms and therefore can lay aside any concern for democracy, justice or international law. Bluntly put, it is Darby’s prophecy that settles the issue once and for all, and the Gentiles can only adjust. The eschatological end (the ingathering of the exiles and the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine) amply justifies the means (displacing Arab population from their homes).⁴⁹ Akin to their national religious counterparts, Evangelical dispensationalists recite selected biblical mantras to reinforce such consequentialist statements. Recurrently, they invoke the scriptural evidence that ‘God owned the Promised Land and had deeded it to the children of Abraham through Isaac, not Ishmael’ – the firstborn and illegitimate son of the Jewish patriarch by his maidservant Hagar. Within both the dispensationalist and Religious Zionist narratives, the present-day conflict between Arabs and Jews is often depicted as perpetrating an ancestral feud: the litigation between Abraham’s rejected and appointed offspring, as recounted in Genesis 17:19 and 21:12.⁵⁰

Another key overlapping between the two messianic and millenarian discourses consists in the idea that Restorationism remains enmeshed with the pursuit of purity. Not only do the respective eschatological plans impose a Jewish ingathering into and monopoly over the Land, but they also imply that that sacred enclosure will be purged from its corrupting agents. Darby himself was quite explicit in stating that for the establishment of the Millennium, Eretz Yisrael must be rid of everything that is not ethnically and religiously ‘sound’. He nonetheless saw this cleansing as an act depending on divine fiat:

The first thing, then, which the Lord will do is to purify the Land which belongs to the Jews of the Tyrians, the Philistines, the Sidonians;

of Edom and Moab, and Amon – of all the wicked, in short from the Nile to the Euphrates. It will be done by the power of Christ in favour of His people re-established by His goodness.⁵¹

Along the lines of Rabbi Tau, Darby explicitly refers to the biblical themes and accounts of the Book of Joshua. As Moses' successor, Joshua led, by force of arms and with divine intervention, the conquest and settlement of the Land of Canaan. For the very first time in their brief existence, the Hebrews put an end to their nomadic lifestyle and established a homeland. Following a plan foreordained by God, they became 'Israelites'. As recounted in the Bible, this national foundation includes murderous purification of the Land from the autochthonous tribes (the seven polytheistic nations of Canaan listed by Darby except one), which the Book of Joshua purports as 'heathens'.

That restoration to a harmonious whole entails purification from the 'other side' – a mystical force that embodies evil, defilement or moral corruption – is not an exceptional tenet. Historically, this theme has received countless applications, both in religious and secular discourses. However, it seems to be almost compulsively recurrent in both Christian and Religious Zionism's imagery. As previously noted, drawing from Rabbi Kook's reading of the kabbalistic tradition, Gush Emunim sees the systematic expansion in East Jerusalem and the West Bank as nothing less than a 'metaphysical transformation', a redeeming act that transfers quotas of Eretz Yisrael from the power of Satan to the divine sphere and thereby advances the process of cosmic salvation. In the national religious idiom, territorial conquest involves at one and the same time outer and inner refinement. Purgation through settling the Land is so all-encompassing that it results in self-purification. Insofar as Eretz Yisrael is liberated from the 'aliens', the pious Jew is redeemed from his own 'alienness', and therefore pointed towards sanctity.⁵² The corollary of this assumption is that even a minimal territorial withdrawal would restore Satan's sovereignty over the Land and the individual soul.

US dispensationalism puts an analogous argument forward. Giving up land for the establishment of a Palestinian state would be the first step towards the dissolution of a fully Jewish Eretz Yisrael, and therefore it would hinder the primary focus of Evangelical identity and eschatological yearning. During a heartfelt speech given in Jerusalem in 2003, televangelist Pat Robertson summarized the motives at the base of the Christian Zionist objection to a two-state solution. The pastor exhorted his beloved Israeli listeners not to commit 'a national suicide' by abiding to the international community's recommendations. Any hope to

achieve a sustainable peace by dividing the Land is illusory, argued Robertson, namely in view of the inherently malignant and savage disposition of the Arab counterparts:

I hardly find it necessary to remind this audience of the stated objectives of Yasser Arafat, the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad. Their goal is not peace, but the final destruction of the State of Israel. At no time do they, or their allies in the Muslim world, acknowledge the sovereignty of Israel over even one square inch of territory in the Middle East. If a Palestinian State is created in the heart of Israel with sovereign power to deploy troops, import modern weapons (even weapons of mass destruction) and operate with full secrecy and diplomatic immunity, the ability of the State of Israel to defend itself will be fatally compromised. The slogan 'land for peace' is a cruel chimera.⁵³

For Christian and Jewish Religious Zionists alike, Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and South Lebanon brought neither stabilization in the region nor a lasting peace with the Arab nations, but more terroristic attacks against the Jewish state. In the same way, Sharon's decision to disengage unilaterally from the Gaza Strip in 2005 had the sole outcome of transforming the Strip into a launching pad for Hamas' missiles. In both circles, it is equally held that any attempt to create a Palestinian democracy would be utterly pointless given the Muslim determination to sabotage the divine Covenant and annihilate Israel. In sum, Islamofascists would have no desire for a 'two-state solution', but only for a 'one-state solution' where Sharia law governs the whole of Palestine.⁵⁴ Invariably, the two millenarian-messianic narratives operate through conceptual categories hinting of Huntington's thesis of a clash between 'sealed-off' civilizations. The Jewish exceptionalism is starkly pitted against a menacing Islamic world and without problematizing the myriad of facets and undercurrents animating both terms of the dyad.

The seeds of Amalek

Given the political visibility that they hold domestically and also the repercussions that might result on an international scale from such a policy, the national religious leadership has always avoided calling for a mass Arab transfer from Eretz Yisrael. Although the majority of its fringe members would not object to such a radical measure, mainstream

Gush Emunim recognizes the resident aliens' an autonomous status, whilst reserving 'forced eviction' only for those few agitators who refuse to accept or fight against the Jewish presence and sovereignty.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, some voices within the Merkaz Harav contemplate an unrestrained commandment to ethnic cleansing in the 'state of exception', that is, in case of holy war.

A Torah-based call for what today might be recognized as 'genocide' finds its primary scriptural basis in Exodus 17:16, Deuteronomy 25: 17–19 and, more recurrently, in I Samuel 15:3. Here the Lord of hosts imparts to King Saul the ruthless manner by which to eradicate Amalek and his seeds from Eretz Yisrael: 'now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass'. The Amalekites feature in the Old Testament as Israel's most inveterate foes. In view of their boundless cruelty and treacherous nature, the conflict against them is often depicted as a manifestation of the archetypal opposition between light and darkness, purity and pollution or between the people of God and the forces of evil.

In a controversial article published in February 1980 under the title 'The Commandment of Genocide in the Torah', Rabbi Israel Hess alluded to the Arabs living in Eretz Yisrael as direct descendants of the biblical Amalekites, whilst considering waging war against them a 'sacred obligation', to be carried out until their memory is 'blotted out' forever. Although they represent a wild departure from commonly accepted ultra-Orthodox thinking about the Jews' relationship with the Gentiles, Rabbi Hess' speculations received a first application in the early 1980s, during the Israeli invasion of South Lebanon – a region that Religious Zionists regard as being part of the Holy Land. At that time, the military rabbinate, traditionally infused with national religious fervour, exhorted all the IDF soldiers to follow in the footsteps of Joshua and Saul, and hence deliver the Land from the powers of Satan by exterminating its non-Jewish inhabitants.⁵⁶ In more recent times, during the January 2009 military campaign in Gaza, 'the morals of the battlefield' were once again set on biblical grounds, stirring up a huge debate with the national and international media questioning the secular nature of the IDF.⁵⁷ In order to boost the troops' fighting spirit, the military chaplains delivered pre-battle sermons casting the 22-day operation as a merciless eschatological confrontation between the children of light and the children of darkness.⁵⁸ *Haaretz*, one of the national leading Israeli dailies, reported that before the army units went into the combat zone, several soldiers were passed out IDF-issued flyers with the stamp

of the military rabbinate stating that: 'we are the people of Israel, we came by a miracle to the Eretz Yisrael, God returned us to the Land, now we need to struggle to get rid of the Gentiles that are interfering with our conquest of the Land'. Other pamphlets handed out to the troops quoted Rabbi Aviner as equating Gaza's Palestinians to the Philistines, whilst warning the reader that: 'when you show mercy to a cruel enemy, you are being cruel to pure and honest soldiers. This is terribly immoral. These are not games at the amusement park where sportsmanship teaches one to make concessions. This is a war on murderers.'⁵⁹

Following mainstream Gush Emunim's cautionary approach to the Arab issue, US Evangelical Zionists avoid advocating ethnic cleansing of non-Jewish populations in unequivocal terms. This notwithstanding, they never refrained from backing the most regressive components within the Israeli religious and secular right. Nor do they keep from embracing Gush Emunim's lexicon to vilify the Palestinians' national aspirations. To many dispensationalists, the Arabs currently residing within Eretz Yisrael are, at best, 'alien sojourners' or, at worst, 'Philistines' and 'Amalekites'. Southern-bred Baptist pastor, former Arkansas governor and 2008 Republican presidential primaries candidate Mike Huckabee is well known for his unwavering support for a fully Jewish Jerusalem and for championing the settlers' divine right to live and build in Judea and Samaria as they wish. In October 2007, during a speech given whilst he was still campaigning for the party nomination in New Hampshire, Huckabee expressed his frustration at past and present Israeli decisions to trade portions of Eretz Yisrael for a diplomatic agreement with the Palestinian Authority. Once asked by Rabbi Moshe Bleich about the feasibility of a two-state solution, he argued that:

From its own standpoint of security, Israel should not give up the West Bank or the Golan Heights. I support the creation of a Palestinian state, but I believe that it should be formed outside of Israel. Egypt and Saudi Arabia are possible alternatives. The Arabs have far more land than the Israelis and it would only be fair for other Arab nations to give the Palestinians land for a state, rather than carving it out of the tiny Israeli state.⁶⁰

In August 2009, Huckabee was reported as touring the Holy Land under the sponsorship of Ateret Cohanim, a US-registered non-profit organization that fundraises an average of \$2 million a year to advance its 'Jewish reclamation plan' – national religious front project aiming to win

'demographically' East Jerusalem by replacing its Arab residents with pro-Gush Emunim Jewish families.⁶¹ According to New York State Assemblyman Dov Hikind, one of Huckabee's travelling mates, the overall purpose of taking the foreign trip was nevertheless that of 'shining the spotlight' on President Obama's 'horrific attempts' to revive the peace process in the region, by pressing Netanyahu to halt settlement activities in the Occupied Territories. With such a goal in mind, Huckabee visited and pledged allegiance to some of the Hilltop Youth's illegal outposts in the West Bank, the presence of which defiantly opposes not only the US diplomatic course, but also the decisions of the Israeli government. In recent times, splinter groups like the Hilltop Youth made a name for themselves for leading an isolated, ascetic and commune-like lifestyle aimed at reproducing that of the biblical Hebrews. Hilltop Youth members are also known for their confrontational posture against the Zionist state and for channelling their grievances through callous retaliation against neighbouring Palestinian villages.

Many experts on the subject submit that, in view of its strong anti-nomian charge against secular and religious Zionism alike, the vision of messianic rebirth advocated by this new stream of settlers represents a further radicalization of Rabbi Meir Kahane's pseudo-fascist ideology – and not an offshoot of Gush Emunim. It is interesting to note that what represents a seldom confessed 'state of exception' amid the most zealous of the Religious Zionists becomes an openly admitted 'norm' for all the Kahanists. Rabbi Kahane postulated that the presence of impure *goyim* in the midst of Eretz Yisrael (Muslims, Druze and Christians alike) constitute 'the greatest desecration of the divine name', a major obstacle between the Chosen and their redemptive goal. From this perspective, the negation of the basic civil-human rights of non-Jewish populations, their forceful removal from the Land and, eventually, systematic violence against them become sacred goals in their own right, just as important as the settlement project.⁶² To Baruch Ben Yossef, a contemporary Kahane devotee, the real and only catalyst of Messianic redemption is a ruthless war aimed at extirpating the *Sitra Achra* – the forces of evil of the 'Other Side' – from Eretz Yisrael:

If we want to understand Rabbi Kahane, his message was that we need to go to war because, in fact, what will bring our redemption is not prayer. What will bring redemption is war. But today, we're going in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of war, there's Peace Now. There's an attempt to prevent war at all costs. And if we can force the army to go back to being offensive, an army of revenge, an

army which cares about Jews more than anybody else, then we'll be able to bring the final redemption in the only way possible, through war. War now!⁶³

In the mid 1980s, Ravitzky, Sprinzak and many other concerned Israeli scholars described Kahanism's rising success in view of the rabbi's remarkable ability to strike 'sensitive chords' in the collective anxieties of that particular time. His inflammatory messianism focused on 'one single guilty party', 'a suitable target for one's blame' whose elimination was key to solving a set of very different problems: the threat posed by the non-Jewish demographic growth and Arab terrorism along with other major national security concerns. With Kahane, the twin process of dehumanization and demonization through biblical precedents reached its apex. In angry editorials or during mass rallies, the rabbi's populism went as far as endorsing a racist approach worthy of Hitler's propaganda. Indeed, Kahane's gospel Jewish self-transformation demanded the eviction of all the husks of Ishmael. The Arabs were stigmatized with the epithet of 'vermin', 'dogs' or 'foxes' roaming around Eretz Yisrael with the only purpose to seduce and rape Jewish girls. Preoccupations with racial purity and pollution were so obsessive in the rabbi's mind that he invoked legislation imposing long prison sentences on any Arab who had sexual intercourse with a Jewish woman.⁶⁴

Today, Kahane's venomous rhetoric finds a significant resonance on the margins of the national religious front, within the third-generation *Sabras* – young Israelis born and raised on the hills of Judea and Samaria, and extremely disaffected with the current standing of both secular Zionism and mainstream Gush Emunim. These are the highly militant settlers to which many US Evangelical Zionists lend financial and political support. Huckabee's pilgrimage to the City of David included a visit to Kiryat Arba, the largest of Gush Emunim settlements and, at the same time, the hotbed of the ultra-rightist Kach and Kahane Chai parties – two movements that were officially outlawed in 1994, and are still considered terroristic organizations by Israel, the European Union, Canada and the United States. That the Hilltop Youth incubated in that particular ideological milieu seems to be confirmed by the methods that its members espouse to prevent any further government-sponsored disengagement from the Occupied Territories. Especially after the Gaza pullout, they have been systematically engaging in violent acts against the Palestinians in the hope of eliciting a new Intifada and perhaps even a war between Israel and the Arab nations.⁶⁵

People who must dwell alone

By addressing modern Israel through the same exclusionary biblical claims, US Evangelicals and Religious Zionists remove the Jewish state from the category of ordinary countries. Their sacred postulates equally contend that the only nation that God ever established and appointed as a guiding light to the rest of the world must necessarily dwell alone, as a cell hermetically sealed and divorced from reality. Such an ideal, implicit but rarely admitted within dispensationalist and national religious circles, acquires the clarity of a programmatic manifesto for past and present Kahanists. In the extremist's mind, observes Ravitzky, the Jewish identity is invariably expressed in negative terms, within a context of confrontation and conflict:

Who are we? We are chosen, we are special, we are supreme; we have been set apart from the Gentiles and their abominations. No positive content is added to these declarations. What is good is good simply by virtue of its being the opposite of that which is outside, of the Other, whatever it or he may be. [The Jewish people] are separate, set aside, isolated and different, living apart from all the rest, without the defiling contact with cultures conceived in uncleanness and born in profane vanity.⁶⁶

In order to fulfil its destiny and make history reach its summit, Israel must keep apart from the global community and act outside its recognized norms. By disregarding basic democratic principles and disdaining civil-human rights of the resident aliens, Christian and Jewish theo-politics are conjointly reversing secular Zionism's original project to normalize the Chosen, putting an end to their dissociation from the surrounding world. The irony, it would seem, is that actualizing Israel's universalist mission of restoration causes her a regression into what Boas Evron has called a 'ghetto mentality': an impenetrable and self-sustaining psychological mould in which daydreaming about Jewish might, election and final victory over Israel's foes intermingles with and is reinforced by a feeling of bitter embattlement and persecution. Indeed, superiority complex and victimization become here the 'two magnetic foci of the same [paranoid] power field'. For national religious settlers, Kahanists and their dispensationalist allies, Israel's international isolation and the mounting 'goyish' hostility against her are at one and the same time a necessity and a kind of blessing – the

indisputable proofs confirming the Jewish uniqueness in the eye of God and the approaching final triumph under His auspices.⁶⁷

Jacob's troubles

Following the premillennial rationale described in the first section of this study, dispensationalism reads the current historical situation as 'beyond repair'. The Messiah's return must be preceded by 'the birth pangs' in which the negative reign of the Antichrist temporarily prevails. In keeping with this idea, Darby speculates that the Jewish full restoration heralds a 'great tribulation': a seven-year period of unparalleled anarchy, apostasy, turmoil and natural catastrophes signalling that the lowest ebb has been reached on the global scale. But a world led astray by Satan's emissaries also entails that the Church's dispensation is close to completion, with Israel once again resuming its place at the centre stage in God's plan. After having been suspended during the great parenthesis, the prophetic countdown restarts by focusing on the earthly people who rejected Jesus in the first place. This latter-day trial, also known as 'Jacob's troubles', exclusively concerns God's dealing with His Chosen. In view of its heavenly status, the faithful members of the Church are completely exempted from such End Time woes.

The great tribulation climaxes with the battle of Armageddon, a military conflagration in the midst of Eretz Yisrael. The Antichrist's treacherous rule will last until Christ returns in glory to vanquish his demonic armies, end his tyranny and restore an earthly Davidic Kingdom centred on Jerusalem. Once delivered from all its enemies, Israel would eventually acknowledge Jesus as Messiah, and enjoy beside him a privileged status in the Millennium. All humankind will then be able to live in peace and safety, whilst the Antichrist is cast into a lake of fire and Satan remains bound up in a bottomless pit. At the close of the 1000-year era, however, the forces of evil will be unleashed from their constraints one last time, to organize a short-lived revolt against the Christ's government, which shall be 'squelched' by the heavenly fire. Darby's master plot concludes with a general resurrection, a universal judgement on the basis of how the Gentiles have treated the Jews, followed by a timeless state of bliss and perfection.

It is often overlooked that the divine wrath that will be poured onto the world during the tribulation and, later, the cataclysmic destructions ensuing the battle of Armageddon have the main purpose to make the earthly people receive the returned Jesus as their Messiah. Only in this way can the Old Testament promises to Israel be brought to ultimate

fulfilment. This focus on the Jews is even more ostensible if one considers the 'atypical nature' of the interlude between history and eternity. Contrary to any premillennial convention on the subject, nearly all dispensationalists envisage a millennium featuring the Chosen and their sacred rituals as main protagonists. According to Darby's speculations, a rebuilt Temple of Jerusalem will be the climax of the Millenarian Age, with the Levitical Priesthood and the sacrificial system reinstituted within its sacred walls. In view of its Jewish-centred essence, Darby's theology goes against the grain of mainstream Christology – namely, because it overtly contradicts the assumption that Jesus' redemptive sacrifice at Golgotha superseded the Mosaic Law as a means to atone for human sins.

Vertical escapism

Deeply intertwined with the concept of a separation between the earthly Israel and the heavenly Church is the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture, a watershed concept in American premillennial culture and at the same time the theological backbone of dispensationalism. This doctrine posits that just prior to the downward spiral of cataclysms, the 'true' Church (made up of the pious Christians who have already died, together with those who are still alive) will be 'raptured' out of the world to 'meet the Lord in the air', whilst the rest of the 'unbelieving' humanity is 'left behind' to face the tribulation and Armageddon's final holocaust.

Many theologians and biblical scholars charge that Darby's rapture has no scriptural foundation, and often denounce it as another example of highly concocted faith, obtained by 'piecing together' various yet not plausibly related verses from the Christian canon. Millions of dispensationalists reject the criticism underscoring how the hopeful anticipation of a last-minute and exclusivist exemption from the End Time suffering finds its indisputable scriptural proof in a literalist-futurist reading of Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians (4:16–17):

At the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet-call, the Lord himself will descend from heaven; first the Christian dead will rise, then we who are left alive shall join them, caught up in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Quite bizarrely, proponents of such a hermeneutics hold that Christ will have in fact a 'two-stage' Parousia. The first Second Coming will

be visible only to the Church's members, as Jesus secretly raptures 'the saints' in heaven, sparing them the earthly trials. The second return, known as 'glorious appearing', will instead be visible to everyone else (Jews included) at the close of the tribulation, when the Messiah defeats the Antichrist and inaugurates his Jerusalem-based kingdom. Today, the pre-tribulation rapture represents by far the most commonly preached eschatological scenario in US conservative Evangelical circles. High-profile televangelists make it a pivotal theme in their broadcasts, warning millions of viewers of the horror they would face if they missed the opportunity to meet the Lord in the air. Hundreds, if not thousands, of websites are also devoted to promoting such doctrine towards global audiences.

As an article of faith, the Rapture offers at least three observable advantages. First, it resolves the problems arising from prophetic disconfirmation, which in turn are generated by the need to set a precise date for the Apocalypse. The sense of an imminent Rapture, whose plausibility was further strengthened by the historical realizations of May 1948 and June 1967, provides 'an incentive for believers to organize their personal lives around the thought that Christ could return at any moment, [but] without committing them to a falsifiable scenario of last-day events'.⁶⁸ Second, by placing believers in a perpetual state of excitement and uncertainty, the lack of a specific date for the Lord's secret return functions as a remarkable spur to keep one's soul in check in terms of self-purification and faithfulness – or, as Fenn describes it, it puts dispensationalists 'in the middle of chronic purgatory', relentlessly on the watch for whatever might delay or impair their unique chance to be snatched away from a collapsing world.⁶⁹ Third, adopting Ernst Becker's terminology, the Rapture might be assessed as one of most perfected 'immortality projects' known to contemporary Western civilization: an effective symbolic expedient assuaging the distinctively human fear of death that stems from the likewise distinctively human awareness of it.⁷⁰

The 'psychology of deliverance' inherent in the any-moment Rapture is a more potent determinative in adding adherents to the 'dispensationalist party' than any other logics underpinning Darby's biblical exegeses. In other words, the core of premillennial consensus would be built around the 'confidence that current toils, frustrations, disappointments, or difficulties' will be forever eliminated by a 'vertical escapism' towards heaven.⁷¹ In his historical study accounting for the changes in the Western attitude towards mortality, Philippe Ariès maintains that the old, durable and massive sentiment of familiarity with one's own finitude (a sentiment distinguished by 'neither fear or despair, half-way

between resignation and mystical trust') has been progressively replaced by the 'pornography of death'. The interdiction on the thought of dying has become today a culturally acknowledged taboo, replacing sex as principal forbidden subject of conversation. Although a causative relationship cannot be plausibly proven, it deserves nonetheless attention that, for the French medievalist, a systematic 'denial of death' aimed at preserving the diametrically opposed idea of an 'inalterable happiness' began to take hold in US culture from around the beginning of the last century – that is, at the same time in which Darby's prophetic speculations were acquiring momentum within the emerging fundamentalist movement.⁷²

Taking the analysis of its symbolism to a deeper level, it may be convincingly argued that the Rapture is an immortality project in which survival demands seeing somebody else suffering and dying in one's place. Those who espoused Darby's End Time scenario expect to watch the demise of the 'unbelieving world' from a front seat in heaven's balconies, a 'vantage point' in which the raptured saints feel secure from all the violent wars, persecutions, earthquakes and plagues befalling the wicked who have been left behind. To Rossing, a bird's eye view of the world's obliteration whilst the faithful can escape its torments represents 'what Dispensationalism is all about'.⁷³ This voyeuristic quest for immortality recalls the human desire for outliving others so masterfully described by Elias Canetti. Every 'moment of survival', Canetti maintains, is not simply an immense pleasure and relief, but an intrinsic 'moment of power':

The terror at the dead man lying before one gives way to satisfaction: one is not dead oneself. One stands upright oneself, unhurt, untouched. And whether he is an enemy whom one has killed or a friend who has died, it suddenly looks as though death, which one was threatened by, had been diverted from oneself to that person. It is this feeling that very swiftly takes the upper hand; what was only just terror is now permeated with satisfaction. Survival is central to power. The living man never considers himself greater than when confronted with the dead man, who is felled forever: at this moment, the living man feels as though he had grown. ... But even if the deceased meant little to one and no special demonstration of grief is expected, it nevertheless would flout good taste to reveal any of the satisfaction at being confronted with the dead man. It is a triumph that remains concealed, that one admits to nobody else and perhaps not even to oneself.⁷⁴

Dispensationalism turns what should remain a discretely concealed triumph into a loud and clear theological statement. According to theologian Michael Northcott, a religious community steeped in the suggestion of a selective Armageddon, one in which only the elected will escape, survive and watch from above the violence unfolding below, is ideologically prepared or perhaps even prone to social inequalities and polarizations. The Christian ethics inherent in Darby's doctrine, adds Northcott, impeccably match with the moral dispositions underpinning the neoliberalist free market, rampant corporate capitalism, gated communities and policies envisaging high rates of incarceration for controlling the most disadvantaged members of society – all present-day US realities in which the rich are incommensurably blessed, whilst all the rest are 'left behind' in the tribulation zone.⁷⁵

The Armageddon complex

Apart from lending unconditional support to modern Israel and backing the national religious enterprise in the West Bank, those US dispensationalists who live in the shadow of Second Coming are also renowned as strong advocates of the so-called 'Armageddon complex': an eschatology that predicts and imposes an End of Days cataclysm in the Middle East as a precondition to salvation. Mirroring the original archetype of the Apocalypse, dispensationalists always see history in a descending phase. Nothing pure can be regenerated, but it must necessarily decay before attaining ultimate perfection. Once the lowest ebb has been reached, a cosmic ordeal is needed to sweep away the old and the flawed, making room for the 'new heaven and new earth'. The current historical aeon is by assumption beyond repair, too corrupt for reforms and thus doomed to complete annihilation. The appeal of the Armageddon complex resides in its ability to render global turmoil and anomie into an assurance of imminent redemption. Indeed, the harsher the birth pangs, the sooner the Rapture. Further, the catastrophic transition between the two ages shows no compassion whatsoever towards those who remain outside the circle of the elected.

In light of these rationales, dispensationalism has often been dismissed as a 'pathological theology', whose downfalls go far beyond those underpinning any consequentialist logic – a logic according to which the absoluteness of the end overrides any ethical consideration about the means of realization. Considering the graphic imagery that permeates all past and present dispensationalist rhetoric (religious or fictional alike), one may easily argue that the cathartic violence inscribed

in the means is fetishized to an extent that it becomes an end in itself. As Mark Juergensmeyer puts it, annihilating the unbelieving world is performed within a theological context that turns that destructiveness into a source of spiritual nourishment, something per se 'holy'.⁷⁶ The distinctive passion that dispensationalists show for the self-destroying and self-creating fire of the Apocalypse strikingly resonates with Robert Jay Lifton's idea of 'nuclearism': humankind's deification and worship of the very agents of its potential annihilation, another 'immortality project' set out to overcome our fear, frailty and biological finitude.⁷⁷

Jerusalem as a thermometer

At present, millions of US Christian Zionists focus their imagination almost entirely on modern Israel, with Iran and the Muslim world serving respectively as a specific and general 'antithetical other'.⁷⁸ Once current events in the Middle East are interpolated with Darby's prophetic script, Jerusalem becomes at one and the same time a geopolitical pivot and a barometer of the end of history. The understanding of the Holy City as eschatological *axis mundi* transpires from many columns of the dispensationalist magazine *Philadelphia Trumpet*. In the April 2009 issue entitled 'Incredible Hope in a Hopeless World', author Brad McDonald summed up some previous 'worldwatch' forecasts to reach the following conclusion:

Passages in both the Old and New Testament show that Jerusalem is the centre around which world events orbit in the months and days leading up to the return of Jesus Christ. To those who understand this prophetic reality, Jerusalem is more than just another city blistered by chaos: It's a thermometer for measuring, and anticipating End Time events. Zechariah 14:1–2 is a seminal passage outlining the events in Jerusalem immediately preceding Jesus' return. His vision explains that immediately prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the entire city of Jerusalem 'shall be taken' by a conquering force. ... What this prophecy indicates is that Iran, backed by a Hamas-dominated Palestinian insurgency, will take half the city of Jerusalem captive. [This will] start a chain reaction of events – an avalanche of crises – leading directly to Christ's Second Coming! ... We need to watch Jerusalem, this remarkable thermometer of End Time events, more closely than ever. Even now, events in that city indicate that the Messiah's return is imminent, and that the time rapidly approaches when Jesus Christ will transform Jerusalem into exactly what its name means: a city of PEACE!

For Jerusalem to fulfil the dispensationalist script and therefore become the Millenarian 'City of Peace' in which Jesus Christ rules, the temperature must necessarily rise. The Israeli capital is expected to be 'blistered by chaos', persecuted to an unprecedented scale and 'dripping with blood'.⁷⁹ In their public endorsements of the Zionist cause, US Evangelical churches and organizations invariably argue that the present perilous climate enjoins every Christian to pray for Israel and stand on her side, as the Jewish people have been 'targeted for genocide' by the Islamofascists. However, consistent with their premillennial hopes, many Christian Zionists are also remarkably happy to be standing on the brink of a nuclear Armageddon in which the earthly people, and not them, will partake.

This seems to be implicitly confirmed by their innate tendency to celebrate events that most of Israelis would consider as calamitous. Amid US dispensationalists, speculations about the Rapture or other End Time 'joys' greatly increase following crises or outbreaks of violence in the Middle East involving the Zionist state. On 21 July 2006, for example, as soon as the missiles started to be launched against Israel by Hezbollah or Hamas, prominent Evangelical and Republican broadcaster Janet Parshall gleefully announced: 'these are the times we have been waiting for. This is straight out of our Sunday Bible School lessons. We are on the edge of eternity.'⁸⁰ On a similar note, in his 2006 bestseller *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World*, Pastor Hagee saw the events unfolding in the Middle East as confirming the dispensationalist script about the imminence of the 'Ezekiel War': the first climatic confrontation between God's forces and the Antichrist's armies, which will precipitate the downward spiral of events leading to Christ's second advent.

That in the last years the Iranian Islamic Republic has been actively enriching uranium would be another unmistakable sign that the world is very close to the tribulation years heralding the Millennium. An atomic showdown with then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad being inevitable because foretold in the Book of Jeremiah, argued Hagee, Israel and America should not wait too long and pre-emptively strike Iran.⁸¹ Nonetheless, confronting Iran's nuclear capability programme in the terms that the pastor suggests would not represent a Clausewitzian 'continuation of politics by other means' but, rather, a way to light up the dispensationalist Apocalypse using the Israeli state and the Jews living in it as a 'match'.⁸²

Utopian peace

Given its profound anti-historical charge, the eschatology of US Evangelical Zionism seems to share more affinities with the zealots

dissenters at the margins of the national religious spectrum. Akin to Christian Zionism, both Etzion's post-theocratic Zionism and Kahanism embrace a catastrophic form of messianism in which final fulfilment can only be obtained through a violent cataclysm uprooting the current aeon. This theological stand could not contrast more with the naturalistic reading of redemption that instead dictates the political involvement of mainstream Gush Emunim. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the kabbalist lore on which Kookism is based values history as a channel for Jewish salvation. The intra-mundane task of cosmic restoration is pursued asymptotically and with the aid of the secular state, by settling the national religious cause in the Land and in the heart of the Israelis. Accordingly, the current dispensation cannot suddenly be abolished by an apocalyptic outbreak because soteriological meaning is continuously extracted from its course.

Nonetheless, there seems to be one point at which all these three very different redemptive projects converge. US Christian Zionism, Gush Emunim and its radical fringes posit a state of peace in Eretz Yisrael as a final and utopian ideal, a concept that is utterly indifferent to the conventional rules of political-diplomatic praxis. To US Evangelicals the dialectic between violent Armageddon and the Millenarian bliss eschews any possibility for negotiation between the parts. No peace in the Middle East can be realized or even thought of until and unless the Second Coming is reached catastrophically. Therefore, any effort to settle the Israeli-Palestinian dispute in the present dispensation is 'at best a lack of faith or at worst a rebellious defiance towards God's pre-defined plans'.⁸³

Given the cosmic scale of the Manichean opposition, 'the articulation and adjudication of differences' can only be advanced by means of 'an all-or-nothing' eschatological confrontation. It is written in the Bible that pacifism prior to that final victory is nothing but trafficking with the Antichrist.⁸⁴ Etzion's and Kahane's worldviews function on similar premises. As far as their theologies of permanent warfare are concerned, no appeasement is deemed possible with the ontologically evil and impure *goyim*, but only their utter defeat and obliteration. Peace is a messianic goal that can be achieved solely by purging Eretz Yisrael from its corrupting agents. Despite its gradualist approach to redemption, mainstream Gush Emunim espouses a no less radical stand. After the signing of the Camp David Accords, the Chief Rabbi of the Israeli settlement of Yamit in the Sinai Peninsula, Yisrael Ariel, protested that 'the true peace for which we aim and to which we must educate [our people] is that based on the unification of the human race around one Torah'.⁸⁵

The etymological affinity between the Hebrew words *shalom* (peace) and *shlemut* (wholeness, perfection, something that is undivided and free of defects) may shed a light on the Religious Zionist disposition towards a diplomatic agreement with the Arab world. Even for the least anti-historical amongst these three redemptive projects, the utopian nature of the goal eschews the scope for political manoeuvring. Ravitzky observes that in so much as there can be no Jewish return to Eretz Yisrael except a complete return,

there can be no Jewish notion of peace except a perfect peace. Peace is no longer merely a contingent political concept, attainable in the course of history, but an ahistorical one, the peace of the End of Days prophesied by Isaiah and Micah. 'True peace' must be based on utter harmony, love, and [Jewish] brotherhood, not just on a balance of forces that keeps conflicting interests in check. [In this sense,] many of the younger Kook's disciples, the leadership of Gush Emunim, saw the peace agreement with Egypt as a betrayal, not only of the ideal of the integrity of the Land of Israel, but also of the integrity of the Jewish idea of peace. The elevation of an idea to utopian status prevents it from being realized, even partially, in the here and now. If peace is understood in exclusively Messianic terms, political activity aimed at achieving it is, in effect, neutralized – even if that means leaving the field of history to the forces of war. For Messianic perfection knows no compromise.⁸⁶

It is interesting to note that what secular diplomacy sees as an attempt towards a sustainable peace in Palestine is altogether rejected by Evangelical and Religious Zionists alike as the starkest attack on peace. Decision-making about the future of Eretz Yisrael should take nothing but the 'Jewish side' into any account. As Aran puts it, messianic peace represents a solipsistic orientation toward the sacred, 'something between the Chosen and their God – and not a complex web of diplomatic or strategic relations between communities and states'.⁸⁷ Once interpreted as an ultra-mundane state of perfection, peace becomes a zero-sum game. Although in millenarian and messianic hopes, this totalistic concept looms ahead, in the guise of a futuristic stage to be fully realized only at the End Time, the methods of its implementation are already indiscriminate and uncompromising during the present age.

Giving up on the world

Mainline Reform, Orthodox and Catholic denominations, and sometimes more progressive forms of US Evangelicalism, often criticize

dispensationalism as a belief system in which ecclesiology and Christology are subordinated to an exclusionary and violent eschatology. This subordination would negatively impinge on a proper understanding of Christian ethics along with their social application.⁸⁸ Conversely, those Evangelical, charismatic, Pentecostal and independent Bible churches that endorse Darbite premillennialism often see mainline Christian denominations 'with hostility and have at times understood the World Council of Churches and related bodies to be tools of the Antichrist'.⁸⁹ The nature of this stark opposition reflects, to a significant extent, the way in which the two theological orientations understand and approach the current historical dispensation: the former as a channel for social reform motivated by Christ's teachings as codified by institutionalized churches; the latter as entirely pervaded by evil and therefore only worthy of obliteration.

This anti-historical posture is also reflected in how dispensationalists interpret their Messiah. For Boyer and many other critics, the kind of Christological figure whom US premillennialists celebrate and wait for would be an appalling departure from the 'lowly' Jesus of Nazareth – the defeated and suffering Messiah whose message of unconditional love, non-violent resistance and forgiveness is located by mainstream Christianity in the synoptic Gospels.⁹⁰ Within the framework Darby set for millions of US Evangelicals, rather, Jesus is the victorious Lamb riding on a white steed with his eyes flaming fire, which is instead described in the final chapters of Revelation. According to Darby's acolytes, this End Time warrior-king will avenge the world's accumulated injustices with a sharp sword, smite the heathen nations, rule over them with a rod of iron, carry out selective judgement and exclusive salvation and abolish history with a Jewish millenarian kingdom centred on Jerusalem. In this sense, dispensationalism reprises to the highest degree the Combat Myth inscribed in the Davidic messianic tradition, whilst altogether downplaying or rejecting the inclusive and atoning meaning associated with the Cross – a meaning that, as far as many New Testament theologians are concerned, is supposed to unravel and have impact intra-historically and in the current aeon.

As central to the divine plan, mainstream Christianity presents that Jesus consciously faced martyrdom to wash humankind's sins away. Further, Golgotha inaugurated the coming Kingdom of God, which is based on the Church's earthly working inspired by Jesus' teachings. Being placed in the world and finding solutions to the deep problems that confront humankind, accordingly, would be the primary task that every Christian has to face. In contrast, dispensationalists interpret the crucifixion mainly as a symbol of failure, one marking

the postponement of the intended Kingdom, which will only be made manifest when Jesus returns as the Davidic king, exercising precisely the form of political power [that many Christians] claim Jesus rejected. [In mainstream Churches,] Jesus is worshiped and glorified because he was slain, and it is in his suffering to the point of death that we find the meaning of human history. In Dispensationalism, we will not see [the real] Jesus in his glory until he returns as a conquering warrior and theocratic ruler. Ultimate meaning is located in the future fulfilment of promises to the nation of Israel.⁹¹

Considering these stark differences in terms of Christology, the mundane engagement that mainline Churches often promote becomes in dispensational theology a mere 'second order program, entirely subservient to God's dealings with Israel'.⁹² Today, millions of US Evangelical Zionists are keeping faith with this peculiar anti-historical stand when they argue that the only kind of sociopolitical action that the heavenly people can subscribe to is restoring more exiles to Palestine, broadening Jewish control over the Land and strengthening Israel's military prowess in sight of a nuclear Armageddon with Iran. Ironically, these Evangelicals act in this world, but only with the purpose of expediting its final demise. With his famous 'lifeboat' metaphor, Chicago premillennialist Dwight Moody made it crystal clear that the real goal is not to improve present reality (as a postmillennialist might argue), but selectively to 'snatch' people out of it:

I look on this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a lifeboat, and said to me, 'Moody save all you can.' God will come in judgment and burn up this world, but the children of God do not belong to this world; they are in it, but not of it, like a ship in the water. This world is getting darker and darker; its ruin is coming nearer. If you have friends on this wreck unsaved, you had better lose no time in getting them off.⁹³

Moody's 'flight from the world' encapsulates the source of distinctive indifference or hostility that US dispensationalists display toward civic, political and cultural responsibilities other than their blind commitment to the Zionist cause. In essence, premillennialism is about liberating believers from their enslavement by history, setting them free from the burden of time suddenly and violently. This faith is set on the destruction of everything that man has become as a historical being. It is only by degrading mundane reality that dispensationalists can achieve their union with the sacred. Quite telling is their attitude towards environmental conservation

and non-renewable natural resources. Given that biblical prophecies tell us that only a few generations are left before Armageddon, it would be morally justified to 'abuse the world as we will soon lose it'.⁹⁴

Participatory shift

Until the first half of the last century, the idea that the End could be forced, let alone by political means, just had a few proponents within US dispensationalist circles. Although conscious to be living at the close of history, the vast majority of Evangelical Zionists believed that only God could move the hands of the prophetic clock. They consequently shunned earthly involvement, remaining nevertheless watchful and spiritually prepared. According to Timothy Weber, it took two key historical occurrences to galvanize dispensationalists out of their passivity and render them active players in the political arena: the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948, and its territorial expansion following the Six Day War in June 1967. Weber compares the early dispensationalists to spectators in the stands of a stadium who watched history unfolding down below, on the playing field. Only few of them believed that they could or actually should expedite Darby's prophetic timetable. Once the millenarian ideal of a third Jewish Commonwealth seemed to have been translated into a modern state, which later expanded its territory threefold almost to meet the biblical boundaries of Eretz Yisrael, a profound shift took place in the dispensationalist mind and predisposition towards history: 'no longer content to be observes only, US Christian Zionists descended to the playing field and became important participants in the world they were sure was rapidly passing away'.⁹⁵ Millions of Evangelicals started implementing 'politically' their End Time hopes, with the confidence that the reappearance of the greatest Jew of all time, the Lord Jesus Christ, was imminent.

Similar to the Religious Zionist case, one might observe a mutual creative tension between millenarian ideals and empirical reality, which also functions as a remarkable catalyst for theo-political mobilization. Although their redemptive modes and goals vastly differ, Christian Zionism and Gush Emunim read the same mundane events – the founding of the Zionist state and, 20 years later, the Jewish recapture of East Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Golan Heights – as indisputable validations of the Covenantal promises to Israel.⁹⁶ In both cases, not only did this miraculous alignment between religious ideal and historical reality confirm the 'beginning of the flowering of redemption', but it also prompted believers

into meaningful action in order to push the respective messianic–millenarian processes forward, towards their finalization.

As far as US dispensationalists are concerned, the convergence between prophecy and historical reality was so overwhelming that it had significantly altered the original application of their premillennial faith. Notwithstanding the world was seen irreparably doomed and the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Jewish restoration were believed to come to pass regardless, it became critical for many in the Bible Belt to reconsider their traditional indifference towards the current aeon. The motive at the basis of the participatory shift might essentially be twofold. First, as Ravitsky would describe it, dispensationalists began to act in the world on the assumption of having been singled out for the highest purpose in life. The overconfidence about the redemptive spin that history had taken gave them the impression of being almost in exclusive partnership with God. This compelled them to assume a purposive role in that cosmic drama that they believed to be unfolding in the Middle East. Second, their theo-political surge might also depend on the typically dispensationalist sense of the impending End, but without a fixed date – a sense that the events of May 1948 and June 1967 further emboldened in the mind of countless End Time believers.

On the subject of setting a date for the Apocalypse, O’Leary charges that ‘greater specificity may turn [premillennial] audiences into passive spectators awaiting the fall of the final curtain on history’, whereas indeterminacy would open up a more fluid prophetic timetable that might encourage the same audience to participate as protagonist in that ‘dramatic finale’.⁹⁷ The two decisive turning points taking place in a 20-year span inaugurated, for those who lived in the shadow of the Second Coming, a ‘transitional phase’: as previously argued, the apocalyptic impression of standing on the cusp of two qualitatively different ages, in this case history and eternity. Rather than putting brackets around thoughts and actions, this sense of imminence and liminality would spur believers into forcing a closure, and therefore complete their transition into the new and blissful Millenarian Age.

Weber makes it crystal clear that, being multiple the responses that can stem from the same eschatological orientation, there has never been or ever will be such a thing as a typical or uniform premillennial style of political engagement. However, following Jonathan Butler’s analytical categories, Weber describes the Evangelical Zionist approach towards mundane reality as follows:

Instead of abandoning the social order or manoeuvring on the fringes, some premillennialists assume political and social responsibility.

Naturally, their participation in politics is discriminatory. Premillennialists are very selective about what they become involved in. Their approach tends to be individualistic, moralistic, and short-term. That is, they usually refuse to get involved in long-term projects for social transformation. They know that they cannot change things permanently. But they believe that there are some things that they can do. Therefore, many premillennialists decide to give the Devil all the trouble [they] can till Jesus comes.⁹⁸

In view of their focus on assisting the Jewish return to and control over Eretz Yisrael in order to precipitate the Second Coming, the Christian Zionist engagement with the defiling world would be distinctively short-termed and highly discriminatory. Believers are also called on to enter the domain of public life with the main purpose of bringing US domestic and foreign policies in line with Darby's master plot. Nonetheless, Washington's corridors of power must be lobbied only until Jesus Christ secretly evacuates his people through the Rapture 'airlift'. After that event the current dispensation is lost in the darkness of disinterest since it must collapse in the final apocalyptic ordeal. The paradox consists in the fact that, in keeping with their dispensational eschatology, US Evangelicals are impelled to operate resourcefully and purposively within history, but only to advance the already fore-ordained plan to abolish its course violently.

The politics of the Apocalypse

The awakening of US Christian fundamentalism as a major force to be reckoned with began in early 1970s. Whilst mainstream Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations witnessed a steep decline, conservative Evangelicalism rose in terms of membership, financial assets and missionary activities, becoming the fastest developing sector of American Christianity.⁹⁹ The drive for such a remarkable growth was Darby's premillennial doctrine, now popularized through the modern media of mass communication. With their televised sermons reaching millions of viewers, the charismatic evangelists, Jerry Falwell and Pat Roberson, started preaching their doomsday gospel focusing on modern Israel to large audiences. During the same period, Hal Lindsey's great publishing phenomenon, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, rendered the obscure passages of Ezekiel, Daniel and Revelation into an intelligible script that readers could use to put current affairs in the right prophetic perspective. Further, the Dallas Theological Seminary established itself as the academic and ideological 'Vatican' of premillennial dispensationalism, also

becoming one of the most prestigious training grounds for Evangelical clergy and laity, both in the US and around the world.

Not only did dispensationalism enter with confidence into the US public life and popular culture, but it also encroached on the domain of domestic and international politics. Since the early 1980s, Evangelical dispensationalist leaders forged alliances with American Jewish pressure groups and Israeli politicians in favour of the Zionist cause. At the same time, relying on grassroots networks able to reach and mobilize millions, the Christian right began to wield considerable influence as a key voting bloc for the Republican Party, trying to put in office only candidates with views and programmes in line with their eschatological agenda focused on Israel.

An impressive corpus of literature has been published about George W. Bush's spiritual orientations and the strategic ties that he maintained with the conservative Evangelical circles prior to and throughout his two mandates at the White House. As Emilio Gentile reports in his essay about US civil religion in the wake of September 11, countless assessments of Bush's persona and political leadership have been built up by scanning his religious beliefs and questioning their sincerity. At stake was judging whether the unusual messianic tones of his presidency represented an aberration from the course of the American tradition or a marked expression of its very essence. Two main categorizations often emerged. Bush was labelled either as a 'sanctimonious' president held hostage by the Evangelical right; or as a 'mediocre but astute politician, who dressed up a cynical and unscrupulous political line in religious clothes, aiming solely at fostering the interests of the pressure groups that had financed his electoral campaign'. As Gentile points out, discerning between the two realms might be an inconclusive exercise, especially if one considers the impact of September 11 on the processes of sacralization of politics and the politicization of religion. Indeed, as a result of the traumatic attacks and the ensuing 'holy war' mentality of the Global War on Terror, the two dimensions seemed to intermingle almost to the point of losing their respective boundaries, and not only within the American context.¹⁰⁰

Another disputed issue concerns Bush's alleged dispensationalist leanings. Although it is probably impossible to ascertain the extent to which the president, himself a born-again Christian, embraced or sympathized with such a prophetic creed, it is indisputable that he constantly courted Evangelical audiences in which Christian Zionist leaders and believers featured prominently.¹⁰¹ For their part, the latter hailed Bush's arrival at the White House as the beginning of a spiritual revival

that would have brought God right back to national politics. Especially when compared to the scandalous conduct of his predecessor, Bush's religious and moral credentials made him the righteous leader whom many Evangelicals so eagerly awaited in order to regenerate America towards its idealized standards of a 'Christian nation'. After the new president introduced Bible study groups in the White House along with the unprecedented custom of opening every government meeting with a prayer, many in the Bible Belt were led to believe that God Himself had answered their wishes.¹⁰²

According to such reliable sources as the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Evangelical votes turned out to be a key in both the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.¹⁰³ It is therefore plausible to assume that for Bush, or any other politician in his entourage, it would have been almost impossible to ignore the demands stemming from that segment of religious voters – in particular those concerning the modern State of Israel. It is well known that, as his presidency was reaching its conclusion, Bush attempted to leave a footnote in history by championing 'the expansion of freedom and peace in the Holy Land'.¹⁰⁴ A special report by the journalist Bill Moyers on the 2007 Annapolis peace talks gave a very simple but nonetheless poignant representation of the kind of impasse in which Bush's foreign policy had been constantly caught in. The narrating voice opens the report by explaining that during that event two opposite dynamics were colliding with each other in the same centre of power, but at different levels of political negotiations. As Bush officially discussed a two-state solution with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the White House, down below, in the lobbies, his National Security Advisor was trying to placate some Evangelical representatives who saw in the same diplomatic solution a 'lynching' of the Jewish state.¹⁰⁵

Many contend that presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and even Bush Sr tended to be more decisive in their criticism of Israel's settlement activities in the Occupied Territories, whereas both Bush administrations lent such activities an almost tacit approval.¹⁰⁶ Nearly every study denouncing the political remit that US Evangelical Zionism acquired during the Bush era quotes the 'Jenin incident' to back the claim that the Bible Belt's lobbying in Washington represented a 'safety net' for Israel's unilateral policies in the Occupied Territories. In March 2002, in response to the Netanya suicide bombing known as the 'Passover massacre', Prime Minister Ariel Sharon launched 'Operation Defensive Shield', with the primary goal of dismantling the Arab terrorist network in the West bank, thereby preventing further suicide

bombings against Israeli civilians.¹⁰⁷ During the siege of the northern town of Jenin, 23 IDF soldiers were killed in the fighting along with 53 Palestinians, a disputed number of which were civilians. In view of the fact that it was considered the hotbed of Palestinian militancy, a refugee camp located in the proximities of the town was extensively targeted in the operation, with the IDF also keeping the Red Cross and other humanitarian aid organizations from intervening for thirteen days. The ensuing international outcry led to a UN resolution demanding that Israel withdraw from the West Bank 'without delay'. No longer able to ignore the mounting international pressure, President Bush eventually sided with the Security Council and asked a defiant Sharon to pull out of the Palestinian areas without further delay. This decision angered and at the same time spurred a key component of Bush's electoral base into action. Wagner takes the following events as indisputable proof of Christian Zionism's theo-political influence in Washington's corridors of power:

Prominent Christian Zionist leaders, working closely with pro-Israel groups in Washington, used their media and internet outlets to mobilize their constituencies to deliver tens of thousands of telephone calls, e-mails and letters to the President, telling him to refrain from pressuring Sharon and to allow Israel to finish its job [the elimination of the terrorist cells and infrastructures from the West Bank territories]. In the aftermath of that campaign, Bush did not utter another word of opposition to Israeli military actions. Falwell told the CBS news program *60 Minutes* that after the incident, Israel could count on Bush to 'do the right thing for Israel every time'. The lesson was that even when the Bush administration criticized Israel, the Israelis, conscious of the extensive support they enjoy in the US Congress, would not take it seriously.¹⁰⁸

In his seminal study on American nationalism published in the wake of the Iraq War, Anatol Lieven submits that a substantial pro-Israeli twist in the US Middle East policy coincided with what he calls a 'southernization' of the Republican Party. Such a process, adds Lieven, began with Bush's first election and reached its apex in 2004, at a moment in which the 'White South' (a shorthand for the conservative Evangelical constituency steeped in Darbite premillennialism) was overrepresented both in Congress and in the Senate. Lieven, together with many other concerned voices, warned that the Christian right's hold on Capitol Hill was putting at risk the constitutional separation between Church

and State, whilst providing religious support to a form of 'chauvinist nationalism' geared towards the Middle East.¹⁰⁹

The study's last and longest chapter, 'American Nationalism, Israel and the Middle East', is focused on ascertaining the extent to which the Evangelical right was able to align US foreign policy with Israel's staunch unilateralism and expansionism in the Occupied Territories. Here, the London School of Economics political scientist underscores how, during the Bush era, the regressive coalescence between eschatological hopes and ultra-nationalist impulses turned out to be a 'calamitous liability'. For Lieven, the 'love affair' between Evangelical Zionists, 'neocons' and Israeli right-wingers did far more than curb the national aspirations of the Palestinians. It in fact alienated many moderate voices within Muslim societies, whilst proving remarkably fruitful to radical Islam in terms of propaganda and recruitment.¹¹⁰

That during the Bush era dispensationalist leanings had spilled into mainstream US politics was epitomized by an official speech that James Inhofe gave at Capitol Hill as early as March 2002. In that circumstance, the prominent Republican Senator and the Christian right (also known as the New Christian Right) member clarified the main motive why Israel should continue to settle in the West Bank:

Because God said so. This is the most important reason. Look it up in the Book of Genesis: [it] says that Abraham removed his tent and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built an altar before the Lord. Hebron is in the West Bank. It is the place where God appeared to Abraham and said 'I am giving you this land.' This is not a political battle at all, [but rather] a contest over whether the word of God is true.¹¹¹

Another calculated dispensationalist effort put in place to win hearts and minds to the cause of the Jewish state is the so-called 'Tour Bus Diplomacy'. Under the pretext of guiding US Evangelicals around the sites where Darby's prophecies were said to come true, this initiative brought and continues to bring millions of visitors to the Holy Land, generating substantial revenues for the Israeli economy. In such prophecy-based itineraries, little is usually mentioned about the life and teaching of Jesus, but much more is mentioned about the divine right granted to the Jewish state in its struggle against the Palestinians.¹¹²

Restorationism remains, however, a key earthly commitment to move the prophetic clock forward. Since their political activation, Christian Zionist churches and congregations have been engaged in a twofold

task. On the one hand, they provide financial aid to the existing Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories. In a way strikingly reminiscent of the indulgences system fully operating in pre-Reformation Roman Catholicism, US Evangelicals can secure quotas of eternity by signing into a distance adoption of a Jewish community living in Eretz Yisrael. On the other hand, they economically and logistically assist those Diaspora Jews willing to make 'aliya' (return) to Judea and Samaria.¹¹³ These twin initiatives are directed at consolidating and increasing Jewish demographics in the West Bank, and therefore make an eventual Israeli disengagement from it more difficult or even impossible. Despite having been at odds for 2000 years, observes Shalom Goldman, Jewish messianism and Christian millenarianism have in the last few decades especially begun to converge. The core of this most unexpected, previously inconceivable and wide-ranging theo-political alliance consists in the shared effort to establish facts on the ground aimed at overturning the territorial partition of Eretz Yisrael and, in that manner, furthering the respective redemptive vision.¹¹⁴

Colin Shindler contends that the real catalyst for the symbiotic partnership was, more than the Six Day War, the *mahpekhah*: that political revolution originating from the destabilizing setback of the Yom Kippur War that put an end to the Labour Party's three decades of hegemony and inaugurated the era of Jabotinskyian Revisionist Zionism. To Shindler, 17 May 1977, the day that Menachem Begin won a landslide victory in the national elections, represented a crossroads for Gush Emunim and US Christian Zionism alike. For the first time, these two newly emergent messianic-millenarian movements could rely on a secular platform sympathetic to their 'land-hungry' policies. Despite some initial frictions caused by Begin's decision to return the whole of Sinai to Egypt in 1982, a honeymoon between the Likud Party and the Bible Belt continued undisturbed until the summer of 2005, when Sharon's government bowed to the demographic realities of the region (8000 Jewish settlers living in one-third of the Gaza Strip, surrounded by 1.3 million Palestinians) and decided to pull out unilaterally from Gaza. As Shindler points out, US Christian Zionism found in Likud's maximalist policies a conduit for their aspirations toward Armageddon, whereas the Israeli secular right discovered in US dispensationalists unwavering supporters, numerically stronger and far more dependable than the traditionally liberal and overtly dovish members of American Jewry. From the early 1980s onwards, Likud premiers strategically utilized Evangelical Zionists either to pressurize the White House or to counteract criticism of Israel's settlement policies stemming from both American Progressive Christianity and Reform Judaism.¹¹⁵

At present, the rising star within the New Christian Right spectrum is the already mentioned pastor John Hagee, the spiritual leader of the San Antonio Cornerstone congregation – a non-denominational Evangelical ‘mega church’ that declares that it gathers more than 19,000 under its roof. In addition, the pastor boasts a television and radio audience of 99 million homes. In 2006, Hagee launched the non-profit group of the Christians United for Israel (CUFI), with the purpose of teaching Evangelicals the ‘language of Washington DC’ and coordinating their lobbying effort to keep the US foreign policy constantly pro-Zionist. Superseding traditional organizations like Falwell’s Moral Majority or Robertson’s Christians Coalition, CUFI has recently become the new dynamic reality of US conservative Evangelicalism. It claims ‘426,000 active members, 40 events per month, a growing network on college campuses, and Hispanic and African American outreach’.¹¹⁶ Its annually organized summit ‘A Night to Honour Israel’ has been attended over the years by such influential American and Israeli figures as Joseph Lieberman, John McCain, Elie Wiesel, Abe Foxman, Benjamin Netanyahu, Shimon Peres and Dore Gold. The 2006 kick-off event also received formal words of support from the former president, Bush and his wife.

Journalist Rachel Tabachnick points out that, notwithstanding his influence and public visibility, Hagee represents a kind of ‘oddity’ in the Evangelical spectrum, namely in view of his theological background. In 1975, the pastor abandoned the Assemblies of God, the largest and most influential Pentecostal denomination in the US, to become an influential national leader amongst independent (nondenominational) Charismatic churches. The vast majority of CUFI directors, leaders and host churches have similar moorings. The pastor and his organization would therefore be representative of a new and ascending trend within the American dispensationalist faith and culture – one that at present wields the most considerable power by drawing on international missionary networks and television and radio worldwide broadcasts.¹¹⁷

Pastor Hagee’s two hats

The moment that dispensationalist leaders chose to embark on a route of politics, rhetorical skills and stratagems need to be developed to accommodate two almost irreconcilable demands. On the one hand, their political approach and praxis should acknowledge and to some extent satisfy the longings for an apocalyptic denouement stemming from their religious constituencies; on the other, in order to present themselves as credible political players, dispensationalist leaders need

to allay scepticism, concern or embarrassment that those very longings generated amid either political opponents or potential partners.

This conundrum became fully apparent in the late 1980s, when televangelist Pat Robertson decided to run for president. To avoid the polemic that his long-standing Armageddon advocacy was likely to raise, Robertson had to redefine significantly his theological trajectory from pure premillennial dispensationalism towards 'nebulous' postmillennialism.¹¹⁸ In an essay dedicated to a rhetorical analysis of his public speeches during that period, O'Leary reports that:

Robertson gradually departed from the pessimistic scenarios of Antichrist, Great Tribulation and Armageddon and began to offer representations of the future that resembled the postmillennial [position]. ... Invoking the Puritan sense of America's covenantal destiny, Robertson claimed that the answer to the nation's troubles lay 'in a new rise of faith and freedom that will give to every American a vision of hope and opportunity'.¹¹⁹

Entertaining political ambitions entails revisiting the interpretation of biblical prophecies. The televangelist had to move away from, or at least downplay, the catastrophic scenarios distinguishing his premillennial faith, to embrace a more optimistic vision in which transcendental fulfilment was pursued intra-historically through a gradual reform of American society, both in moral and material terms. However, such a reshuffle downplaying the destructive side of the Apocalypse with the idea of human perfectibility – that is, the argument that the eschaton could be approached asymptotically – failed in convincing two 'crucial audiences'. Within the dispensational camp, many denounced the shift in religious rhetoric as a 'heretical embrace' of postmillennialism bordering on 'secular humanist philosophy'. As conservative Evangelical minister Jimmy Swaggart pointed out, Robertson's contention that 'Christians can overwhelm the world and transform it into a community of peace and prosperity' is nothing but a 'false picture of utopia' that finds little resonance in biblical prophecies. These, on the contrary, would speak mainly of 'imaginable conflicts and excruciating suffering', demanding Godly rather than human intercession.¹²⁰ No less encouraging responses came from political opponents and media commentators, which equally labelled Robertson's disavowal of Armageddon theology as disingenuous opportunism. The twofold reaction caused Robertson to be discredited and marginalized and, ultimately, resulted in his defeat at the primaries.

Although he never considered running for the White House, Pastor Hagee is today confronted by a similar predicament. At every attempt to broaden CUI's appeal and acceptance within the American national domain, he must face the daunting task of striking the exact balance between the marked apocalyptic charge of his dispensational faith and the rules of mainstream politics. In order to overcome this impasse, Hagee strategically resorts to a 'double standard' approach, affording the pastor to modulate his message in accordance with the identity and inclinations of its recipients.

Whenever he intervenes in the wider public arena, where dispensationalists represent only a minority amongst other secular and religious audiences, Hagee tends to 'whitewash' his doomsday register and lexicon. He accordingly presents his Zionist commitment in less eschatological than geopolitical and cultural terms. Israel and the Jewish people who live within and beyond its borders matter not as a vehicle for Christian deliverance from the world, but because of the crucial values and common spiritual heritage that they share with the United States. Supporting the Zionist state, along with its maximalist policies in the West Bank, would be the best manner to foster democratic progress in that region. Since its national foundation, Israel has been the 'canary in the coalmine', 'the scout' in that conflict opposing Western civilization to 'a new onslaught of hatred stemming from the Islamofascists'.¹²¹ Furthermore, another salient non-eschatological reason that Evangelicals often publically quote in order to justify their political stand is the guilt for ongoing centuries of anti-Jewish prejudice, persecution and oppression, which several Christian churches – namely European – tolerated or even supported.¹²² If theological issues were to become pertinent whilst Hagee speaks to the outer world, the pastor would vehemently reject the view that the Evangelical love for and dedication to Israel is embedded in End Time speculations, emphasizing that, rather, it stems from Christian observance of the Covenantal promises as recounted in Genesis. These arguments notwithstanding, Darbite eschatology appears to remain the elephant in the room, the nettlesome issue that US Christian Zionists are always reminded of and uncomfortable to account for. For instance, after reporter Max Blumenthal raised the alleged dispensationalist leanings of his organization during a 2007 press conference, an annoyed Hagee retorted that 'our support of Israel has absolutely nothing to do with End Time prophecy'. Blumenthal was invited to leave the premises and was then escorted by CUI's security personnel.

An entirely different approach is endorsed when the pastor addresses his religious congregation in the auditorium of the Saint Antonio mega-church, during his televised sermons or in the pages of his End Time pamphlets. Here Hagee becomes a 'rethor' (rhetorician) who persuades the 'already converted' by framing events through the lens of Darby's prophetic script. In this more intimate setting, everything occurring on the historical horizon has a meaning that points towards the catastrophic finale: 'when you see what's happening in America and the world, it doesn't take long to realize that God is proclaiming through the voice of nature that we are approaching the coming of Jesus Christ in the clouds of heaven'.¹²³ Following O'Leary's explanation about how the 'Apocalyptic persuasion' is rhetorically built within dispensationalist circles, the rethor would be a personality endowed with charisma whose discourse arouses and fulfils an End Time 'appetite' in the minds of his auditors by interpolating historical occurrences with Darby's predictive schemes. If the apocalyptic persuasion is successfully construed, adds O'Leary, a virtuous bond is established between the rethor, his audience and the prophetic script.¹²⁴ It is within this particular setting that Hagee feels at ease in justifying his support for the Zionist cause on fully eschatological grounds. In this context, the pastor can read the signs of the time to confidently charge that the rising Arab turmoil engulfing Israel is nothing but the harbinger of a foreordained chain reaction leading to the Rapture, the Tribulation, the appearance of the Antichrist and his rule, the battle of Armageddon and the establishment of the Millenarian rule centred in Jerusalem – all topics that would be extremely hard to digest for a non-dispensationalist public.

In keeping with these arguments, Sarah Posner, the associate editor of the online journal *Religion Dispatches*, and a major expert in the New Christian Right, notes that Hagee studiously wears 'two hats': one as a visible pro-Zionist activist whose support is courted by leading national and Israeli politicians; the other as a pastor of an Evangelical congregation that gathers millions of souls living in the shadow of the Second Coming.¹²⁵ Simultaneously straddling two hardly compatible realms, mundane politics and anti-historical End Time speculation, might nevertheless present the same pitfalls as those that caused the Robertson fiasco. On the one hand, to over-accommodate the demands of the political game could put at risk the basis of Hagee's religious consensus. In particular, compromising on key eschatological principles might alienate those hard-core premillennialists who draw essential spiritual comfort from apocalyptic rhetoric. This appears to be the case especially

if one considers the most recent and fastest growing additions to US dispensationalism: the Pentecostal and Charismatic streams, representing an aggressive 'new breed' of premillennialism that takes the doomsday narrative to its extreme that has also shown itself to be remarkably committed towards hastening the coming of the Millennium.¹²⁶

On the other hand, in view of the catastrophic predictions and scathing theodicy on which they base their authority, dispensational leaders will always find it difficult to present themselves as credible players within the public arena. In spite of the effort to conform to the accepted rules and codes of secular politics, their Armageddon theology calling for the violent annihilation of the world and the demonization of out-group opponents is bound to remain a liability for those who aspire to speak the language of Washington. This last assertion seems to have been validated once more during the 2008 presidential campaigns, when Republican Senator John McCain had to distance himself from CUFİ and ultimately reject Hagee's political endorsement as a result of a long list of outlandish jeremiads that the latter had previously uttered. In late February 2008, the pastor labelled the Catholic Church a 'great whore' and a 'false cult system' playing a primary role in the Holocaust. The criticism already mounting up on a national scale intensified even further when new derogatory statements surfaced: most notably when Hagee commented that Hurricane Katrina was nothing but a divine retribution for a gay pride parade planned in New Orleans for the week in which the hurricane made landfall.¹²⁷ Furthermore, on 18 September 2005, during a sermon at his mega-church, the pastor linked this event – one of the deadliest natural disasters in the history of the country – to the Bush administration's decision to support the Israeli pullout from the Gaza Strip as a preliminary step towards a two-state solution, as follows:

I want to ask Washington a question. Is there a connection between the 9000 Jewish refugees being forcibly removed from their homes in the Gaza Strip now living in tents and the thousands of Americans who have been expelled from their homes by this tremendous work of nature? Is there a connection there? If you've got a better answer, I'd like to hear it.¹²⁸

Although not directly evoking an End Time scenario, it is undeniable that these controversial remarks are an offspring from Hagee's dispensationalist outlook. This goes to say that until and unless the 'Apocalyptic sting' is completely removed, US Christian Zionists cannot

affirm themselves as a plausible player in a pluralistic political system. Nonetheless, removing that sting might involve an unbearable spiritual loss for many of its adherents. Given the patent anti-historical and catastrophic stand underpinning premillennialism, US Christian Zionists and their theo-politics will attach most of their fortunes to the state of exception, and always struggle to survive, let alone flourish beyond the extra-ordinary. This represents a major difference with Gush Emunim, a movement whose naturalistic and gradual understanding of redemption makes its political engagement comparatively easier.

One may object to extrapolations being made from only two case studies, Evangelical and Jewish Religious Zionism, proceeding from far too narrow a base to support a general statement. Even so, an assumption can at least be put forward at this level of analysis: once established as a stable system of hierocratic authority, or after having obtained formal recognition within a given political system, religious movements with strong apocalyptic-messianic agendas tend to renegotiate their original catastrophic or revolutionary rationales. For a movement so concerned with otherworldly salvation such as US Christian Zionism is, becoming deeply involved in electoral politics and foreign policy imposes a difficult revision of its theological worldview. However justified, it might appear to achieve more political purchase and thereby press forward the eschatological agenda, any process of mundane institutionalization represents for a premillennial movement a 'doctrinal oxymoron'. The middle-of-the-road position between purely apocalyptic beliefs and political ideology aimed at attaining intra-historical duration can hardly be located, let alone maintained. This contradiction in terms may as well produce profound repercussions in the movement's membership. If core ideals of sudden and catastrophic palingenesis were to be sacrificed beyond recognition (put differently, diluted into the infinite postmillennial approximations towards the eschaton), the group identity might be so seriously undermined as to create the premise for internal crisis, secessions or even disbandment.

That political involvement tends to alter eschatological beliefs – sometimes even to the extent of their complete transfiguration – represents a meaningful counterpoint to the other general assumption advanced in the course of this study that, with their call for absolute renewal, eschatological beliefs impact on political reality. As far as theo-political phenomena like Christian and Jewish Religious Zionism are concerned, the relationship between mundane reality and transcendental ideals is not given once and for all. The two dimensions seem to

remain in a dialectic tension, constantly adjusting to each other over the course of time.

Adversus Ioudaeos

The traumatic experience of the Holocaust reintroduced with unprecedented urgency the question of whether Christianity was, at its doctrinal core and from its historical beginnings, the primary source of Western anti-Semitism. Many theologians and scholars concentrated on the so-called *adversus Ioudaeos* ('Against the Jews') tradition: as explained by Rosemary Ruether, a Christian self-understanding constructed in a fundamental opposition to Judaism, whether through repudiation of its supposed errors or by supersession of its virtues.¹²⁹ It has already been argued that the Jewish ideal of a human fellowship set apart by divine election and thereby endowed with the mission to further universal salvation was a template that the emerging Church aimed to appropriate as its own. Ruether also contends that an approach ranging from anti-Jewish apologetic to overt anti-Semitism was part and parcel of early Christianity's attempt to affirm and differentiate itself from Judaism, without however severing the roots with its essential spiritual moorings. In fact,

Judaism cannot be jettisoned entirely from the Christian worldview, lest the markers of Jesus' own identity lose their points of reference and the kingdom He proclaimed be emptied of its content. St. Augustine provided the category of 'witness people', arguing that the Jews are necessary for the continuation of Christian life until the *Eschaton*. Wrong as they are, the Jews in their very error serve the purposes of vindicating the Messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfils, exemplifying the contemporary consequences of rejecting God's grace, and validating the Second Coming by their acknowledgement of the one whom they have not previously recognized. The Jews may by definition be diametrically 'other' than what Christianity is, but they are the necessary other of Christianity's ongoing life.¹³⁰

Fenn contends that as 'the only nation on earth to have its history written in advance', biblical Israel serves as a primary 'focal point' for any social or religious congregation that lays claim to live at a crucial turning point in history or in a special dispensation of grace.¹³¹ In keeping with René Girard's theory of mimetic desire, Israel might be easily

recognized as a theological rendition of what the French scholar calls a 'model-obstacle'.¹³² This syntagm captures an ambivalent and contradictory attitude towards the desired object, in our case what biblical Israel symbolizes in the eyes of many non-Jewish believers. On the one hand, in view of its exclusive relationship with God and the task of cosmic salvation that it is entrusted to lead on His behalf, the Israelite nation represents an unparalleled model of perfection and holiness, which demands to be worshiped and imitated. On the other hand, that model establishes an insurmountable obstacle to one's desire towards holiness and perfection, mainly in view of the fact that the actual existence of Israel precludes someone else's chance to attain such a privileged status and relationship with God.

Once interpreted in a Girardian guise, the beloved Israel is bound to turn into a 'hated rival', or as Girard would probably put it, a 'mimetic double', that entices one's desire for holiness and perfection, but also stirs resentment by blocking the fulfilment of that very desire. In eschatological terms, whenever a community sees itself closest to the supreme redemptive finalization, it might come into violent confrontation with the model-obstacle embodied by Israel. As will be seen in the following pages, an almost schizophrenic oscillation between the most servile love and the most envious hatred towards the Israelites permeates both Darby's End Time script and its current application in US Evangelical Zionism.

In view of the obsessive casting of the tribes of Israel as foils in Christendom's march toward the Millennium, dispensationalism and its adherents no doubt represent a theological unicum. In no other circumstance, argues historian Yaakov Ariel, 'has one religious community assigned a predominant role to another religious community in its vision of redemption or claimed that the other group holds a special relationship with God'; in no other case 'has one religious group invested so much hope in another group as the key brokers on the road to universal salvation'.¹³³ Nonetheless, whilst considering the Jewish people to be vital in God's plans for humanity, dispensationalism does not translate only into philanthropic support for Zion. That some worrisome innuendos or even blatant statements constantly recur throughout past and present Evangelical discourses, rather, would suggest that what at first glance might appear as love and dedication is in reality a more ambivalent, if not self-contradictory feeling.¹³⁴ As Weber and Boyer well documented, along with their mass rallies honouring God's Chosen nation with Hebrew singing and Israeli flag-waving,

US Christian Zionists have always nurtured a 'dark side' in their attitude towards the beloved Children of God.¹³⁵

Many take issue with Darby premillennialism, arguing that the latter forces Judaism and the Jews into the service of the conservative Evangelical *Heilsgeschichte*. The Jewish people would be nothing more than 'pawns' in somebody else's eschatological game. Although nominally rejecting replacement theology (as previously detailed, the idea that the Church rightfully became 'the new, true Israel, with no room left in God's Covenant for the old, benighted Israel'¹³⁶), Christian Zionism remains strictly ingrained in a supersessionist logic, especially if one considers the ancillary role that Darby earmarked for the earthly people. A quite remarkable analogy can be drawn between the dispensationalist logic and the idea of heterogenesis of the ends, as theorized by the elder Rabbi Kook. Insofar as the forefather of Gush Emunim recognized in secular Zionism a mundane tool unwittingly pursuing the sacred cause of messianic renaissance, Darby posited the earthly people as unknowing instruments of a divine process that, through their ingathering in Eretz Yisrael and final acceptance of Jesus, will bring about Christian salvation. Given such undeniable finality, dispensationalism represents a controversial theology encroaching on any serious interfaith dialogue between Judaism and Christianity.

Despite remaining a distinct ethnic-religious entity alongside the heavenly Church, the Jews will eventually need to be subsumed within the worldwide fellowship of people who recognize Jesus as their saviour. Evangelical Zionism conceives of both the Israeli and Diaspora Jews not as a self-standing religious community, but 'as a remnant of an ancient people who carry a special mission and are predestined to help bring the drama of Christian salvation to its conclusion'. In keeping with this view, Judaism cannot per se provide

its adherents with spiritual comfort, moral guidelines, and, most important of all, salvation. Only in Christianity could Jews, as individuals, find eternal life and, as a nation, the peace and security they sought, as well as the fulfilment of their destiny as the chosen people.¹³⁷

It is not surprising that theologians who are well versed in both eschatology and interreligious matters are those to be mostly concerned about the far-reaching implications of Darby premillennialism. For instance, Peter Pettit, the director of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding and an associate professor of religion, holds that the

threat associated with Christian Zionism is essentially twofold. First, the apartheid separation between the earthly and heavenly people is bound to contrast the Jewish errors with the Christian truths. In so doing, the Dual Covenant approach would perpetuate or even exceed the shortcomings and dangers stemming from replacement theology. Second, interpreting Judaism as the 'left hand of Christology' remains an idealized form of Judaism, a Christian 'construction' that finds no resonance whatsoever in either the Israeli context or Diaspora Jewry. By taking its bearings more from the eschatological needs of US dispensationalism than from Jewish life and the Jewish community, adds Pettit, this fetishized idea of Israel would 'indelibly mar any genuine relationship with Judaism – if not perhaps our very identity as Christians', and also add into 'the very sour substances of old Christian anti-Semitism'.¹³⁸

Rabbi Cook charges that anti-Semitic potentials are inscribed in the essence of dispensational theology, in particular in the core belief that 'the onus for delay' in completing God's prophetic timetable rests on His Chosen.¹³⁹ The love and dedication professed towards Zion do not prevent prominent Evangelical leaders from expressing impatience (or even contempt) toward those Jews who seem not to attend to or even betray their End Time assignment. The feeling that what really counts is not the Jewish people's wellbeing but the eschatological rationale that they fulfil seems to have been proven by a number of controversial statements. In 2006, Pat Robertson suggested that Sharon's descent into a comatose state was a divine punishment inflicted upon the Israeli prime minister for his policies undermining the integrity of Eretz Yisrael. Eleven years earlier, the televangelist addressed Yitzhak Rabin's murder by an Israeli religious zealot in not too dissimilar terms to those endorsed by the Israeli Religious right. As stated by Robertson, Rabin would have paid the toll for having contravened God's national policy statement, as enshrined in Genesis.¹⁴⁰

In keeping with their prophetic hopes, US dispensationalists seem to expect and even welcome a state of constant warfare engulfing modern Israel. This represents another glaring contradiction if one considers the concern that many Evangelical Zionists like Hagee boast today for Israel's national security. A similar course is followed whenever US Christian Zionists mobilize their political assets in order to keep the US and Israeli governments from making any diplomatic overtures towards the Palestinian authorities or the wider Arab world that might stabilize the region. Dispensationalists believe that a violent confrontation between the Chosen nation and its non-Jewish neighbours represents the true and only harbinger of millenarian peace. Escalating turmoil

and violence in the Middle East is also conducive to the spiritual refinement of God's people, once the Christian faithful have already departed the earthly scene. One should never forget that, according to Darby's economy of salvation, the underlying purpose of the Tribulation period (otherwise known as 'Jacob's trouble') and of Armageddon itself is to condition a remnant of Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah in compensation for their ancestors' rejection of him.¹⁴¹ To appreciate the far-reaching consequences of premillennial dispensationalism – especially from an interfaith dialogue perspective, it seems essential to take thoroughly into account what past and modern-day Evangelical Zionists have to say in regard to the Jews and their End Time fate.

Christian Zionists usually feel neither responsible nor accountable for the moral implications that their belief system carries. Claiming that it stems authoritatively from the Bible, they often invoke the principle of Jewish guilt for deicide, the long-standing 'corporate indictment' at the basis of every kind of Christian anti-Semitism. Central to Darbite prophecies is the idea that Jesus offered the Kingdom of God to Israel and himself as a messiah, but the Jewish people discarded such an offer and crucified Jesus. As a result, it has been argued here, the final fulfilment of God's promises to Israel had to be postponed and the Church's interim inaugurated. From that moment, the Chosen are considered to be in a state of 'unbelief', that is, 'under a "national blood-guiltiness" for killing Christ, a stigma that could not be wiped away until the Second Coming and the Jewish repentance for it'. Being in unbelief is also the underlying justification that dispensationalists use to frame pogroms and persecutions befalling the Jewish people: 'as a nation, the Jews crucified their king, therefore the nations will crucify them' until they repent for that fateful and sinful misdeed. The brutality and frequency with which they have been harassed over the centuries should make the Chosen realize the magnitude of their spiritual blindness.¹⁴²

Following the dispensationalist plot, the Jewish refinement towards a Christian rebirth climaxes during the seven-year Tribulation. Although the End Time trials are meant to invest all sinners who missed the Rapture's window of opportunity (Jews and Gentiles alike who have been 'left behind'), Israel will no doubt be the primary target of the coming judgement. Dreadful events loom ahead for the Jews according to Darby's calendar, as 'the Christ-rejecting nation must drink the cup of God's wrath to the last drop'. Previous disasters and persecutions would pale to insignificance if compared to the mass ordeal that the Chosen will undergo whilst the Antichrist reigns on earth. Hitler's 'Final Solution', many dispensationalists submit, was 'just a foretaste'. Deriving

such a prophetic claim from a reading of Zechariah 13:8, Darby charges that during Jacob's trouble the Antichrist will slaughter two-thirds of the Jews regathered in Palestine. This new and unparalleled Holocaust is nevertheless portrayed as 'a means to a good cause', as Israel's suffering would ultimately yield to her glorious Christian destiny:

The time of Jacob's trouble will definitely be a part of Israel's sorrowful and tragic history. The unbelief and failures of Israel are pruned and punished through the unparalleled fires of the tribulation. The Jewish remnant entering the Millennium at the end of the Tribulation will thus have been purified for God's Kingdom.

It is worth noting that according to the dispensationalist plot, both forces of good and evil work in unison to draw the 'godly remnant' back to their original fold. Otherwise put, the astounding Jewish bloodbath that the Antichrist unleashes during his reign is part of God's plan to redeem the Jews from their state of unbelief. As previously done during the entire course of history, God allows Satan's emissaries to be the rod of chastisement and correction for His favourite but rebellious people. The Jews, Boyer observes, are thus confronted with the ultimate 'catch-22': regardless of their decision to recognize 'whom they pierced', in the last days supernatural and human forces must exterminate the Jews in ghastly numbers in order to bring the entire cosmos to perfection.¹⁴³ In light of such a divine foreordination, Israel would never be able to escape her tragic fate. As many concerned voices point out, this represents the eschatological bottom line that must be addressed by those American and Israeli Jews who seek to evaluate the nature of Evangelical Zionist support for Israel.

Considering what has been so far detailed, the End Time theology of US Evangelical Zionism appears clouded with paradoxes, logical inconsistencies and, foremost, ambivalence. Tabachnick recently charged that, camouflaged in exuberant love and support for the Zionist cause, Hagee along with many other conservative Evangelicals overtly promote narratives paralleling the classic tropes and storylines of Western anti-Semitism – in particular, those in which the Jews are portrayed not as ordinary people, but as either superhuman or subhuman beings. For Tabachnick, the 'net result' of the Evangelical obsession with Israel is 'stripping away the Jews' hard-won humanity'. This would represent the first step in that symbolic process that in so many historical circumstances led to 'unconcealed hatred, fear, and even genocide'.¹⁴⁴ The pervasiveness of biblical abstractions amid US Evangelicals is also

confirmed by the widespread assumption that the glory of Israel is exclusively past and future. Quite tellingly, the impenitent Jews currently living in unbelief are often held as the major contributors to the moral and sociopolitical decline scourging the present age. A portrayal informed by the super- and sub-human binary finds a resonance in the words of Charles Cook, a prominent member of the Los Angeles Bible Institute. In an article published in the early 1930s with the title 'The international Jew', Cook wrote that:

the Jewish race is morally fully capable of doing all that is charged against it. It is at present rejected by God, and in a state of disobedience and rebellion. As a race, Jews are gifted far beyond all other peoples, and even in their ruin, with the curse of God on them, are in the front rank of achievement; but accompanying traits are pride, overbearing arrogance, inordinate love for material things, trickery, rudeness and egotism that taxes the superlatives of any language. Oppressed are they? Indeed, and subject to injustice more than any other race, and yet never learning the lesson of true humility. For the unregenerated Jew usually has a very unattractive personality. There is a reason for his being *persona non grata* at resorts and in the best society; who can deny it?¹⁴⁵

It is quite telling that in the same article where he highlights the Jewish inherent duplicity, Cook also validates the authenticity of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the most influential piece of anti-Semitic literature in modern times. This early twentieth-century Russian forgery was purported to be the secret proceedings of a Jewish internationalist plot to subjugate and overthrow Western Christian civilization by disrupting its political-economic stability and undercutting its moral values.¹⁴⁶ As Hanna Arendt shows in her seminal study *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, within a short period of time the manuscript became key to any religious or secular ideology aiming at establishing a paranoid outlook on Jews. Because *Protocols* offered indisputable evidence that the powerful and obnoxious Jews were masterminding a global conspiracy to turn the present order into a techno-capitalist dictatorship, the Russian fabrication became the most perfected weapon in the arsenal of Nazi propaganda.¹⁴⁷

From the 1930s onwards, the *Protocols* also acquired momentum within US dispensationalist circles. The main reason for this unexpected popularity was that the anti-Semitic hoax purporting to describe a Jewish plan for world domination seemed to fit perfectly with the

Darbite omen that before the End, 'civilization itself would hang in the balance', with the Jews under the spell of the Antichrist and at the centre stage of the unfolding cosmic drama. The oddity consisted in the fact that, despite adamantly condemning any manifestation of anti-Semitism, Evangelicals believed the Jewish 'hidden hand' to be more or less in every place. After having instigated the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, the Jewish cabal was now scheming behind every communist upheaval. The international and national banking system was controlled by the influential and ominous members of the 'Illuminati conspiracy' – which, according to many Evangelicals, triggered the 1929 Wall Street Crash and was at the same time plotting behind the curtain of President Roosevelt's New Deal. Further, the secular Jewish intelligentsia, who allegedly dictated the tone of Hollywood motion picture production and the agenda of the national press, was to be held accountable for the cultural decay engulfing the country. That such a cabal had spread its tentacles almost everywhere was nevertheless an implicit confirmation that the final apocalyptic denouement was imminent. The Bible had predicted such a crisis just prior to Christ's return (the world touching its lowest ebb before its regeneration), and many devoted dispensationalists could properly frame the Jewish scheming that was behind it.¹⁴⁸

After having fallen into disuse, the myth of a Jewish-led plot regained currency during the 1990s, when Robertson started alleging that an elite network of international bankers – the Rothschilds, the firm of Kuhn, Jacob Schiff, Loeb and the Warburgs – was operating through secret societies to undermine both Christian values and American liberties, with the purpose of taking undisputed control of the entire world. In the pages of his bestseller *The New World Order*, the televangelist reiterated an updated version of the *Protocols*' infamous template by arguing that the sinister plan for Jewish global domination would be nothing but the gateway for that final confrontation between good and evil, bringing history to a close. More recently, a similar paranoia was embraced by Hagee, with his internationally broadcast sermons stating that 'our economic destiny is controlled by the Federal Reserve system that is now headed by Alan Greenspan [and] a group of class A stockholders, including the Rothschilds'.¹⁴⁹

In the last 30 years, the Evangelical allusions to the conspiratorial nature of world Jewry, together with the warnings that Auschwitz was just a 'prelude' to what will happen prior to the Millennium, made no impression whatsoever on the leadership of the Likud Party. Quite the opposite, Likud continues to fortify its traditional ties with US

dispensationalists in a bid to maintain a 'congressional bulwark' against any presidential move against the settlement enterprise in the Occupied Territories. The practical benefits stemming from US Evangelical Zionism seem to outweigh its anti-Semitic proclivities, even for many Diaspora sensibilities. It is safe to assume that belittling the apocalyptic tropes of dispensationalism therefore remains an almost default choice not only for those Evangelical leaders like Hagee who acquired prominence on the national and international stage, but also for any individual Jew or Jewish institution accepting political or financial support from that religious constituency.

The espousal of non-eschatological motives (to justify the Evangelical dedication to Israel) is glaringly evident in the rhetoric of David Brog – an American Jew, a committed Zionist and more recently the executive director of CUFI. To him, there is no doubt that a genuine philo-Semitism is bred in the marrow of Hagee's organization. Evangelical Zionists would represent the 'theological heirs' of those 'righteous Gentiles' who saved many Jews during the Holocaust. Such Christians would share with many American and Israeli Jews the same love for freedom and democracy and, accordingly, the same understanding of the war on Islamofascism. The struggle against this common and threatening enemy would make them 'brothers'. Brog also claims to be an 'outspoken defender' of the Zionist–Evangelical alliance in view of the key role that the Judeo-Christian tradition has played 'in elevating Western morality'.¹⁵⁰

Consistent with his ideological and personal background, Brog is strategically poised under the banner of CUFI to win the hearts and minds of those American Jews who are still uncomfortable with the Evangelical dedication to Zion. In his heartfelt statement *Standing with Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State*, Brog encourages his co-religionists to 'break free from their fixation on past traumas and embrace their Christian allies who fight anti-Semitism as passionately as do the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'.¹⁵¹ It is worth noting that the CUFI executive director discards the most worrisome implications of Darbite eschatology with the following argumentative logic:

There is a wonderful irony in secular critics of Christian Zionism, typically Jewish, complaining about the great disasters that will befall them upon Christ's Second Coming. These critics, of course, don't actually believe that there will be a Second Coming of Christ. If there will be no Second Coming, then there will be no mass

conversion or death [of the Jews]. So what exactly are these critics worried about?¹⁵²

In order to present CUFI as a legitimate political partner to Israeli and Diaspora Jewry, Brog has to line up with Pastor Hagee's efforts to dissociate US Evangelical Zionism from its eschatological bearing. Hence, he underscores the utilitarian side of the partnership by reminding the sceptical Jews that dispensationalism envisages a future in which the Jewish people neither believe nor recognize their fate, whilst Evangelicals are providing essential financial support and political backing for the Zionist cause right now. In an appraisal nearer to an indictment, the ultra-Orthodox Gershom Gorenberg charges that to demean the Jews to this 'mutually exploitative alliance' with US dispensationalism amounts to being complicit with its anti-Semitic overtones. Furthermore, those Jews and Jewish organizations who advocate close ties with the Evangelical right would also undermine

decades of dialogue with Catholics and mainstream Protestants who have undertaken the difficult task of reassessing Christianity's attitude toward Jews. It will be hard for Jews to affirm that reassessment if prominent Jewish groups are working closely with Christian groups like Hagee's which negate Judaism.¹⁵³

At present, the 'stock figure of the scheming and cosmopolitan Jews' found a new home in Islamic apocalyptic literature, to back the widespread assumption that a worldwide Zionist plot controlling mainstream US politics and government is currently at work, this time to pervert the Islamic religious values and murder all Muslim communities. In the years following September 11, especially after the United States became mired in military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq that were perceived as invasions, Muslim apocalyptic fiction became a vast subcultural phenomenon with fast-growing circulation. Either via the Internet or cheaply produced paperbacks, Muslim End Time novels reached millions of readers in Cairo, Beirut, Damascus and Kuwait City, but also in the wider Muslim and Arabic-speaking world. This genre provides a popular platform for the most vociferous and poisonous form of anti-Semitism, steeped in strong eschatological hopes for future Islamic triumph:

With the perceived imminence of the end of times, hatreds have been rendered inexpiable and compromise inconceivable. The

absolute violence and appalling cruelty of Islamist Apocalyptic fictions are sustained by the prospect not only of more and larger massacres, but also genocide. The disappearance of the Jewish people, either by conversion or extermination, is celebrated in advance, and with a fervour that is more commonly associated with eulogists of ethnic cleansing than doctors of religious law.¹⁵⁴

As both David Cook's and Jean-Pierre Filiu's studies illustrate, the idea that a nefarious Jewish cabal is secretly manipulating the world to push it without mercy towards hell finds no resonance whatsoever within the classic scriptural and theological sources of Islam, where the Jews feature only incidentally.¹⁵⁵ That idea would rather be a direct borrowing from Western anti-Semitic discourses. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of Islamic apocalyptic pamphleteers uncritically assimilated the conspiracy template of the *Protocols* through the mediation of dispensationalist exegeses. In stunning detail, Filiu shows how many Muslim radical writers ransacked the enemy's repertoire, in search of material that could be deployed to buttress their own End Time speculations.

The French historian draws attention to the following ironic but nonetheless significant fact: such pamphleteers grant authoritative status to prophetic scenarios concocted by Evangelical authors like Falwell, Robertson, Lindsey and LaHaye-Jenkins, but claim to have understood their predictive meaning better than the dispensationalists themselves. Indeed, by means of this looting, observes Filiu, the Muslim propagandists vengefully turn the Christian Apocalypse back against Israel and its American partisans.¹⁵⁶ In their view, everything in the outside world emanates from *Al-Masih ad-Dajjal* (the Arabic term for the 'false messiah' or Antichrist) and his Jewish minions.

In a mutated religious context, the Jews' dual essence, potent and at the same time malignant, is maintained and even magnified. On the one hand, these secret plots can rely on unlimited financial resources and unassailable positions of power; on the other, they are dead set on infiltrating and subverting the *Umma*, both politically and culturally. Even in this End Time fresco, the satanic successes heralded by the spreading of Jewish conspiracy are part and parcel of that Muslim messianic dialectic leading towards a period of ultimate peace and justice. In line with the noted 'birth-pangs' rationale, the world must be fully pervaded by evil before the Mahdi sets Islam back on the straight and true path from which it had previously strayed. The creation of an all-encompassing, ruthless and ontologically evil Zionist world government would serve as the necessary interlude to a military-political

redde rationem, another Armageddon but this time benefiting the Muslim masses over the Judeo-Christian crusaders.¹⁵⁷

In view of these arguments, adds Filiu, there appears to be a 'curious complicity' between Evangelical and Muslim millenarianisms, both embedded in a strikingly hateful anti-Semitic imagery that 'migrates from one paranoid universe to the other and back again. Transfigured by revanchist authors on both sides of the Apocalyptic divide, [this imagery] ends up casting a long shadow over a single ominous panorama.'¹⁵⁸

An ironic over-assurance

The widespread popularity enjoyed nowadays by premillennial dispensationalism represents a stark counterpoint to the meagre acceptance that this prophetic outlook received when it was first introduced in US society. It was only during the late nineteenth century that a substantial number of American Evangelicals began switching over to the pessimistic views of dispensationalism. The shift in the eschatological paradigm occurred mainly in view of the fact that the postmillennial ideal of a perfect society had failed to materialize. This trend was furthered by the events scourging what historian Eric Hobsbawm has defined as the 'age of extremes'.¹⁵⁹ Conflicts, revolutions and crises ensuing the outbreak of the Great War dissuaded anyone from clinging to the contention that the trajectory drawn by human civilization was unabatedly pointing upward. A world constantly on the brink of self-annihilation ridiculed the possibility of intra-historical salvation, let alone doing so through gradualist reformation. Quite the opposite, the indisputable pervasiveness of evil was the main reason why many reoriented their hopes beyond the current aeon. As a result of a world growing threateningly darker, the vision of a catastrophic ending followed by glorious fulfilment abandoned the fringes of American Evangelicalism, becoming a theological viewpoint that could command the allegiance of millions.

While dispensationalism is often seen as part of that 'cultural package' that US Evangelicals have more or less uncritically inherited in the guise of religious truth, more attentive scholars locate the underlying reasons for its success in a voluntary adhesion. This form of millenarian consensus, they argue, would largely depend on the enduring purchase of some eschatological ideas and tropes that dispensationalism reprises and amplifies. Most notably, Darby's belief system would neutralize or

at least downplay the unsettling complexity of history, by contrasting it to the teleological clarity governing the plan that God has already fore-ordained for humanity. Not only do dispensationalists know the pre-determined end towards which history flows, but also 'how it is going to get there'. In the pages of the morning newspaper can be traced an unmistakable confirmation of what has been carefully spelled out in the prophetic passages of the Bible. Taking confidence from this divinely inspired awareness, one can hardly be afraid of dealing with details. As Weber points out, dispensationalism's greatest source of appeal lies on its remarkable ability to provide 'over-assurance' in turbulent times:

There is something comforting about knowing that historical events fit into a prophetic pattern, that God is guiding everything, no matter how horrible and apparently destructive, to a redemptive end. Once believers find a place for historical events in their prophetic puzzle, such events cease to terrify and bewilder.¹⁶⁰

Any assessment of the ascendancy of dispensationalism, argues Weber, would not be exhaustive without considering that 'ironic comfort' that this belief system can bring to people. Despite the fact that dispensationalists might appear as 'the world's biggest promoters of gloom and doom', their pessimism is only apparent. In Pat Robertson's words, one must not weep at tragedies or misfortunes because these are an 'evident token' of personal salvation.¹⁶¹ The prospect of a deteriorating world, one touching its lowest ebb in political, social and moral terms, is fully accepted and even welcomed. The worse the situation gets, the better things are. God will redress grievances of His faithful only when despair reaches the trigger point required. That everything is decaying signals the imminence of that supernatural intervention that will annihilate in order to make things anew.

It goes without saying that the spiritual comfort that Darby's eschatology so distinctively offers is mostly attractive to those who feel lost and bewildered. An obsessive quest for order always hints at its threatening absence. That dispensationalism is a theology best fit for dark times would be confirmed by the fact that its popularity always peaks at moments in which 'evil seems increasingly irresistible and human survival hung in the balance'. If the trauma of the First World War augmented the purchase of Darby's speculations, so did the threat of an ultimate nuclear confrontation with the godless communists during the Cold War. In Weber's words, 'as long as the world remains a terrifying

place, seemingly bent on its own destruction, premillennial worldviews will always have the ring of truth for many'.¹⁶² It is therefore not surprising that the apocalyptic imagination received a new lease of life in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, when the world, or at least large segments of it, appeared once again prey to Satan and his Islamic emissaries.

117. See Fiege, *Settling in the Hearts*, p. 272 and also pp. 65–6.
118. See John Gray, *Al Qaeda and What it Means to be Modern*, Faber and Faber, 2003, p. 76.
119. See Roger Griffin's lecture notes, 'The Way of the Terrorist: Reflections on Terrorism's Relationship to Modernity', Central European University, Budapest, 15 October 2010. I thank the author for letting me read his notes.
120. See Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism*, p. 391 n. 30; and Aronoff, *Israeli Visions*, p. 87.
121. See Peleg, *Zealotry*, pp. 110–17.
122. Aran, 'Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism', pp. 280–1.
123. Ravintzky, *Messianism*, p. 81.
124. See Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics*, Free Press, 1976, p. 120.
125. Motti Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism and the Temple Mount: Who Will Build the Third Temple?*, State University of New York Press, 2009, pp. 51–3.
126. Janet Aviad, 'The Contemporary Israeli Pursuit of the Millennium', *Religion*, 14, 1984, pp. 199–222.
127. On Yehuda Etzion's theocratic post-Zionism and its relation to mainstream Religious Zionism, see Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, pp. 51–77; Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right*, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 94–9; and Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics*, Free Press, 1999, pp. 155–65.
128. See Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, pp. 51–5.
129. Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother*, p. 253.
130. Colin Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine*, Lion, 2002, pp. 134–5.
131. See Marc Flükiger, 'Jewish Messianism and the Settler Movement: Interview with Gideon Aran', *Religioscope*, 26 November 2005.
132. See Gorenberg, *The End of Days*, pp. 56–70.
133. See Ron E. Hassner, *War on Sacred Grounds*, Cornell University Press, 2010, pp. 114–33.
134. See Inbari, *Jewish Fundamentalism*, pp. 68–9.
135. See Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother*, pp. 158–65.
136. Aran, 'Jewish Zionist Fundamentalism', pp. 267–8.
137. See Gorenberg, *The End of Days*, pp. 117–18.
138. See Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy*, p. 258.
139. This is the underlying hypothesis of Inbari's new study, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises*, Cambridge, 2012.

4 US Christian Zionism

1. I reprise here the 'short' definition that Donald Wager provides in, 'A Christian Zionist Primer: Part II: Defining Christian Zionism', *Cornerstone*, 31, Winter 2003, available at: <http://www.sabeel.org/documents-/CornerStone31.pdf> (accessed 9 October 2006).
2. See John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, Penguin–Allen Lane, 2007, pp. 5–17.
3. See Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism: A Roadmap to Armageddon*, Inter-Varsity Press, 2004.

4. See Mearsheimer and Walt, *The Israel Lobby*, pp. 138–9.
5. In the author's opinion, the most reliable and updated demographic statistics are those provided by Stephen Spector in his study, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 41–3.
6. See John Hubers' editorial in, *Challenging Christian Zionism*, available at: <http://www.christianzionism.org> (accessed 2 February 2010).
7. See Gary Dorrien, 'Evangelical Ironies: Theology, Politics and Israel', and Gerald McDermott, 'Evangelicals and Israel', both in Alan Mittleman, Byron Johnson and Nancy Isserman (eds), *Uneasy Allies? Evangelical and Jewish Relations*, Lexington Books, 2007, pp. 103–26, and pp. 127–54, respectively.
8. Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, p. 36.
9. See John Green, 'Evangelical Protestants and Jews', in Mittleman et al. (eds), *Uneasy Allies?*, pp. 19–38.
10. Timothy Weber's quote is taken from the transcript of the PBS programme *Bill Moyer Journal*, 'Perspectives on Christian Zionism', 5 October 2007.
11. Paul Boyer, 'The Middle East in Modern American Popular Prophetic Belief', in Amanat and Bernhardtsson (eds), *Imaging the End*, p. 312.
12. Quoted in Rachel Tabachnick, 'A Serial Obstructionist', *Zeek: A Jewish Journal of Thought and Culture*, 17 May 2010, available at: <http://zeek.forward.com/articles/116518/> (accessed 19 February 2011).
13. See Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, pp. 21–35.
14. See Aaron David Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab–Israeli Peace*, Bantam Books, 2009, pp. 109–19.
15. George W. Mamo, 'Luckier than Moses: The Future of the Jewish–Evangelical Alliance', in Mittleman et al. (eds), *Uneasy Allies?*, p. 80.
16. See Stanley Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting out the Evangelical Options*, Inter-Varsity Press, 1992, pp. 100–8.
17. See 'Archbishop of Canterbury Says Christian Zionism not Part of Christian Tradition', *VirtueOnLine*, 24 February 2010, available at: <http://www.eurasiareview.com-/2010/02/31898-archbishop-canterbury-says.html> (accessed 26 February 2011).
18. See Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation*, Westview Press, 2004, p. 23.
19. See Elizabeth Phillips, '"We've Read the End of the Book": An Engagement with Contemporary Christian Zionism through the Eschatology of John Howard Yoder', *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 21, 2008, p. 344.
20. For an exhaustive analysis of Christian Zionism's theological framework, see especially Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, pp. 106–205; and Timothy Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, Baker, 2004, pp. 20–3.
21. See Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and Religions*, Yale University Press, 1975, pp. 22–3 and 61–2.
22. Quoted in Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, p. 121.
23. See Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, pp. 100–1.
24. See Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, p. 64.
25. James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, SCM Press, 1991, p. 41.
26. See Ruthven, *Fundamentalism*, pp. 65–6.
27. See Gabriel Fackre, 'Biblical Inerrancy', in Brasher (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Fundamentalism*, pp. 66–8.

28. See Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, p. 118.
29. See Dorrien, 'Evangelical Ironies', pp. 105–11.
30. Timothy Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming*, Academie, 1983, p. 231.
31. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, p. 41.
32. Rabbi Michael Cook, *Modern Jews Engage the New Testament*, Jewish Lights, 2008, p. 249.
33. Craig Hill, *In God's Time: The Bible and the Future*, Eerdmans, 2002, p. 207.
34. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, pp. 156–8.
35. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, p. 28.
36. See Grenz, *The Millennial Maze*, pp. 95–102.
37. Weber, *On the Road of Armageddon*, p. 23.
38. See Cook, *Modern Jews*, p. 240.
39. Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, p. 142.
40. See Donald Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians*, Herald Press, 1995, pp. 62–4.
41. See Robert O. Smith, 'Jewish-Christian Difficulties in Challenging Christian Zionism', *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, 7 (5), 2007, pp. 1–14.
42. See Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 24–5.
43. Aviezer Ravitzky, 'Roots of Kahanism: Consciousness and Political Reality', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 39, 1986, pp. 90–108.
44. See Fiege, *Settling in the Heart*, pp. 117–19.
45. Quoted in Ehud Sprinzak, 'Gush Emunim: The Tip of the Iceberg', *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 21, 1981, pp. 28–47.
46. Quoted in Tal, 'Foundations of a Political Messianic Trend', p. 53.
47. Quoted in Fiege, *Settling in the Heart*, p. 120.
48. Quoted in Hellinger, 'Political Theology', pp. 543–5.
49. See Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, pp. 169–71.
50. See Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, p. 132.
51. Sizer, *Christian Zionism*, p. 162.
52. See Israel Shahak, 'The Ideology of Jewish Messianism', *Race and Class: A Journal on Racism, Empire and Globalisation*, 37 (2), 1995, pp. 81–91.
53. Pat Robertson, 'Why Evangelical Christians Support Israel', *The Official Site of Pat Robertson*, 17 December 2003, available at: <http://www.patrobertson.com/Speeches/IsraelLauder.asp> (accessed September 2008).
54. See Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, pp. 50–75.
55. See Fiege, *Settling in the Heart*, pp. 118–19.
56. See Israel Shahak and Norton Mezvinsky, *Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel*, new edn, Pluto Press, 2004, pp. 64–5.
57. See Katya Adler, 'The Rise of Israel's Military Rabbis', *BBC Newsnight*, 7 September 2009.
58. See Martin Marty, 'Israel's Holy War', *Divinity School at the University of Chicago*, 28 April 2010, available at: http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/publications-/sightings/archive_2010/0426.shtml (accessed 29 April 2009).
59. Quoted in Amos Harel, 'IDF Rabbinate Publication during Gaza War: We Will Show No Mercy on the Cruel', *Haaretz*, 26 January 2009, available at: <http://>

- www.haaretz.com/misc/-article-print-page/idf-rabbinate-publ...mercy-on-the-cruel1.268849?trailingPath=2.169%2C2.225%2C2.226%2C (accessed 9 February 2009).
60. Quoted in Shmuel Hakoton, 'Governor Mike Huckabee: Create Palestinian State Outside of Israel', *The Jewish Russian Telegraph*, 15 October 2007, available at: <http://www.jrtelegraph.com/2007/10/gov-mike-huckab.html> (accessed 23 November 2007).
 61. The controversial plan of Ateret Hacoanim is addressed by Louis Theroux in his reportage, 'My Time among the Ultra-Zionists', BBC 2, 3 February 2011.
 62. See Ehud Sprinzak, 'Kach and Meir Kahane: The Emergence of Jewish Quasi-Fascism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 19 (3/4), 1985, pp. 3–13. Meir Kahane (1932–90) was an American-Israeli rabbi whose messianic doctrine and political activism laid the ideological groundwork for the most extreme form of Jewish nationalism. For an exhaustive treatment of Rabbi Kahane's legacy in the context of past and present Israeli religious radicalism, see especially Ami Pedahzur, *The Triumph of Israel's Radical Right*, Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 61–80.
 63. Quote taken from the transcript of the PBS Frontline's reportage, 'Israel's Next War', 5 April 2005. Peace Now (in Hebrew 'Shalom Achshav') is a well-known Israeli progressive NGO that advocates a just peace and historic reconciliation with the Palestinians and neighbouring Arab nations, to be obtained through a territorial compromise based on the diplomatic formula of 'land for peace'.
 64. Ravitzky, 'Roots of Kahanism'.
 65. See Ami Pedahzur and Arie Perliger, *Jewish Terrorism in Israel*, Columbia University Press, 2009, pp. 111–37.
 66. Quoted in Ravitzky, 'Roots of Kahanism', p. 95.
 67. See Boas Evron, *Jewish State or Israeli Nation?*, Indiana University Press, 1995, pp. 223–41.
 68. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse*, pp. 138–9.
 69. See Richard Fenn, *Dreams of Glory: The Sources of Apocalyptic Terror*, Ashgate, 2005, pp. 80–91.
 70. See Ernst Becker, *The Denial of Death*, Simon and Schuster, 1973.
 71. See Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism*, University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 229.
 72. See Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present*, trans. by Patricia M. Ranum, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, pp. 85–107.
 73. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed*, pp. 138–9.
 74. See Elias Canetti, *The Conscience of Words and Earwitness*, Picador, 1979, pp. 15–16.
 75. See Michael Northcott, *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion and American Empire*, I. B. Tauris, 2004, pp. 68–72.
 76. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, California University Press, 2003, pp. 170–1.
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5 Cultural Apocalypse

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Apocalyptic Movements in Contemporary Politics

Christian and Jewish Zionism

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palgrave
macmillan



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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2014 978-0-230-28041-0

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First published 2014 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN

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Palgrave Macmillan in the US is a division of St. Martin's Press LLC, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

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ISBN 978-1-349-32761-4 ISBN 978-1-137-31684-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/9781137316844

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Typeset by MPS Limited, Chennai, India.