Introduction

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The *image* of the Jew and the Holy Land, moulded by millenarian Evangelicals, was what remained for Lloyd George and his contemporaries, long after the *concepts* of eschatology had vanished. And when we remember this, we see how influential biblical prophecy and the Evangelical movement was in the Restoration of the Jews to Palestine.[1]

Sarah Kochav

The [Balfour] declaration was the product of neither military nor diplomatic interests but of prejudice, faith, and sleight of hand.[2]

Tom Segev

In a letter consisting of three sentences, Arthur Balfour changed the course of twentieth-century history. Writing to Lord Rothschild on 2 November 1917, the British Foreign Secretary informed the most prominent British Jew that the Cabinet "viewed with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (Figure 1). The statement, however, went much further in promising that the government would "use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object." Balfour then invited Rothschild to pass on this news to the Zionist Federation. The "Balfour Declaration" was the single most significant political development in the history of Zionism between the First Zionist Conference of 1897 and the United Nations' vote in 1948 establishing the state of Israel. In this short, typewritten letter, the most powerful and expansive empire known in human history committed

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[1] Sarah Kochav, "Biblical Prophecy, the Evangelical Movement, and the Restoration of the Jews to Palestine, 1790–1860," in *Britain and the Holy Land 1800–1914. Papers presented at the Warburg Institute, 8 February 1989*, 21.

[2] Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs under the British Mandate* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 33.

Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on
behalf of His Majesty's Governmnet, the following
declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations
which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet.
"His Majesty's Government view with favour the
establishment in Palestine of a national home for the
Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to
facilitate the achievement of this object, it being
clearly understood that nothing shall be done which
may prejudice the civil and religious rights of
existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the
rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any
other country."
I should be grateful if you would bring this
declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

[signature]

1. The Balfour Declaration, 1917.

This letter from the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, signaled the British government's commitment to the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine just weeks before Jerusalem fell into Allied hands in December 1917. Its publication is regarded as the most important event in the history of Zionism between the rise of Jewish Zionism in the 1880s and the establishment of the state of Israel by the United Nations in 1948.

itself to the Jewish people in a unique way. The Declaration was issued when Britain was on the brink of defeating the Ottoman Empire in war and thereby acquiring Palestine. In fact, at the very time, Allied troops under Sir Edmund Allenby were approaching Jerusalem, which fell on 9 December 1917. In July 1922, the Council of the League of Nations enshrined the commitment made in the Balfour Declaration in its Palestine Mandate, which formally assigned Britain the governing of Palestine and acknowledged an

explicit responsibility to enable the Jews to establish a national home in the country.[3]

In 1925 David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister under whom Balfour served at the time of the declaration, spoke to the Jewish Historical Society of England concerning the motives behind the declaration, admitting that they represented a mixture of both genuine sympathy and self-interest. Historians have been debating the mixture ever since. Lloyd George highlighted how his upbringing (in a Welsh Baptist home), his schooling, and his Sunday school had inculcated in him a "natural sympathy" toward the Jews and Zionism: "you must remember, we had been trained even more in Hebrew history than in the history of our own country." His schooling in north Wales "taught far more about the history of the Jews than about the history of my own land. I could tell you all the kings of Israel. But I doubt whether I could have named half a dozen of the kings of England, and not more of the kings of Wales." And that was only the diet of his day schooling:

> On five days a week in the day school, and on Sundays in our Sunday schools, we were thoroughly trained in the history of the Hebrews. We used to recite great passages from the prophets and the Psalms. We were thoroughly imbued with the history of your race in the days of its greatest glory, when it founded that great literature which will echo to the last days of this old world, influencing, moulding, fashioning human character, inspiring and sustaining human motive, for not only Jews, but Gentiles as well. We absorbed it and made it part of the best of the Gentile character.[4]

Arthur Balfour was raised in a strongly evangelical Scottish Presbyterian home and was nurtured in a Calvinistic evangelicalism similar to that of the Welsh Baptist upbringing of Lloyd George. Historians in trying to make sense of the religious impulse behind Christian Zionism have failed to appreciate the significance of this shared Calvinistic heritage, totally unaware that Scottish Presbyterians and Welsh Baptists lived and moved in a religious world which had much more in common than the social, ethnic, and denominational barriers that divided them. Balfour's mother, née Lady Blanche Gascoyne-Cecil, was the sister of Lord Salisbury, who served three times as British Prime Minister (1885–6, 1886–92, 1895–1902) before being succeeded as Prime Minister by his nephew, Arthur Balfour. Although a wealthy Scottish aristocrat, Lady Blanche was an earnest evangelical who

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[3] Segev, *One Palestine*, p. 116.
[4] David Lloyd George, "Afterword" to Philip Guedalla, *Napoleon and Palestine* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1925), 48.

taught her children in daily Bible classes, instilling in her son a remark-
able knowledge of the geography of Palestine and familiarizing him with
stories of the Old Testament. She was also known for her personal evange-
listic efforts, undoubtedly scandalizing those of her own social rank and
astounding those of more humble birth by distributing Gospel tracts at the
railway station in East Linton near the sprawling Balfour family estate in
East Lothian in Scotland.[5]

The language that Balfour and Lloyd George repeatedly use concerning
the Jews is significant: "the Jewish nation," "the Jewish people," the "Jewish
races," and a "Jewish national home." Such language was, more often than
not, resisted by British Jews in the nineteenth century for they generally
had adopted the view enunciated by the Great Sanhedrin of 1806, which
had affirmed that the Jews were no longer a polity and had ceased to have a
"national" identity. For British Jews, "Nationalism came to be regarded as a
dangerous heresy which could have perpetuated their alienage."[6] And yet, the
idea of a Jewish national identity, and of world Jewry as constituting a "race"
and a "nation," was widespread among British Protestants in the nineteenth
century. Recent historians have argued that the popularity of these ideas con-
cerning the Jews among the British political elite was profoundly indebted to
the rise of racial nationalism in the late nineteenth century. It was because of
these identity constructions that British policy makers "so readily and stead-
fastly believe[d] that Zionism was the key to the Jewish imagination." Such
was possible only by positing "the belief that there existed a dominant and
unchanging Jewish identity, which was fixed upon the restoration of national
life in Palestine. Jewry was therefore perceived to be a very specific type of
imagined community, a national community." James Renton regards this as a
fundamentally mistaken belief promoted by an influential Zionist lobby. "By
playing upon policy-makers' perceptions of Jews and ethnic groups, with their
portrayal of Jewry as a largely anti-Allied, influential and Zionist Diaspora,
they successfully persuaded members of the British Government to pursue a
pro-Zionist policy."[7] This perception of the Jews as a "nation" needs to be set,
Renton argues, in the context of the emergence of racial nationalist thought
as it developed in European culture in the late nineteenth century. While

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[5] Sidney H. Zebel, *Balfour: A Political Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 2. Kenneth Young, *Arthur James Balfour* (London: Bell and Sons, 1963), 9. See also David W. Schmidt, *The Contribution of British Evangelical Thought to the Making of the Balfour Declaration*, Master's thesis, Institute for Holy Land Studies, Jerusalem, 1995, 55.

[6] Isaiah Friedman, *The Question of Palestine*, 2nd edn. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1992), 32.

[7] James Renton, *The Zionist Masquerade* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 6.

not denying the significance of racial nationalist thought, the acceptance of
these characterizations or imaginizing of the Jews as "a people," "a race," and
"a nation" was widespread in Protestant evangelical circles by the 1830s, well
before the rise of racial nationalism, and, as will be seen, these characteriza-
tions were most effectively promoted in Victorian England by Jews who had
converted to forms of Protestant evangelicalism. The most effective exponents
of Christian Zionism – the belief that the Jewish people were destined by God
to have a national homeland in Palestine and that Christians were obliged to
use means to enable this to take place – were Jewish converts to evangelical
Christianity who did much to shape the development of popular evangeli-
cal thinking in these matters. It was this Protestant religious discourse that
marked the family backgrounds of many of the key members of the British
political elite responsible for formulating the Balfour Declaration.

It is generally agreed that Balfour and Lloyd George were the two most
powerful figures in the British war cabinet; their support of the declara-
tion was crucial. The Lloyd George government formed in December 1916
placed its decision-making power in the hands of the men who constituted
the coalition war cabinet.[8] Among the ten men who served in this cabinet
between December 1916 and November 1917 were three who had served,
or were to serve, as British Prime Ministers during their lifetimes: Arthur
Balfour (1902–5), Lloyd George (1916–22), and Andrew Bonar Law (1922–3).
The Balfour Declaration came, as it were, *ex cathedra* from on high; the coali-
tion cabinet represented all the parties – save the Asquith Liberals – and had
a much greater degree of autonomy than any peacetime cabinet. It oper-
ated enshrouded in secrecy, gave no reasons for the Declaration, outlined
no conditions – other than those in the Declaration itself – and expected no
accountability. The Declaration was not debated in either of the Houses of
Parliament and like most foreign policy issues, was never approved by the
British legislature.

A vigorous historical debate has raged for decades as to the British cab-
inet's motivation in making this declaration. This study engages with the
multifaceted complexity of the motives behind the Balfour Declaration. Early
explanations in the wake of the Great War emphasized the idealism of the

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[8] The membership of this coalition war cabinet was fluid. It began in December 1916 with five
members: Lloyd George, as Prime Minister; Earl Curzon as Lord President; Andrew Bonar
Law at the Exchequer; and Arthur Henderson and Viscount Milner as ministers without
portfolio. Others joined in the succeeding months: Balfour as Foreign Secretary, Edwin
Samuel Montagu as Secretary of State for India, and in June 1917, Jan Christian Smuts as
member of the South African Parliament. In July 1917, Sir Edward Carson was added as
another minister without portfolio, and in August 1917 George Barnes replaced Arthur
Henderson.

British political elite and the religious sympathy among British Protestants for the idea of the restoration of the Jews. This view was most effectively expounded by leading Zionist historians such as Albert Hyamson and Nahum Sokolow who extolled British benevolence as "driven by a mixture of idealism, religious belief, and a desire to redress the past suffering of the Jewish people."[9] James Renton has recently argued in *The Zionist Masquerade, The Birth of the Anglo-Zionist Alliance, 1914–1918* (2007), that a myth of British "proto-Zionism" was created; it served the purposes of the Zionist propagandists employed by the British government. The image was linear, progressive, and vaguely providentialist; history had unfolded in favor of the Jews as a people, Zionist identity strengthened, and Britain was to be praised for its role as the protector of God's ancient people.

Leonard Stein's 1961 work *The Balfour Declaration* took a very different tack, arguing that the two leading motives behind the declaration were related to strategic interests: British propaganda efforts to win American- and Russian-Jewish support for the war effort, and the advantages such a Jewish homeland would give to British national security, ensuring its strategic military control of the Near East. The availability from the late 1960s of new government documentation led to a downplaying of the propaganda motive and to an increased focus on Palestine; yet more recently the propaganda motive has come back into vogue with some historians – such as Tom Segev – focusing on what they see as an anti-Semitic impulse.

James Renton has argued that the British government's rationale in promoting Zionism in the hopes of influencing world Jewry was based on a series of faulty assumptions. Anti-Semitism has been blamed for imagining a united, powerful Jewry who were largely pro-German and either pacifist or supportive of Russian bolshevism. Renton contends, however, that the emphasis on anti-Semitism does not explain why policy makers were so eager to accept that Zionism was the means of winning over Jews to the British side when Zionism was a minority opinion among world Jewry and certainly not the leading view in Jewish political thought at the time. Indeed, in Palestine in 1917, David Ben-Gurion was trying to set up a Jewish battalion in the Ottoman army to fight against the British, and Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, the father of the revival of modern Hebrew, also a Zionist, was urging Palestinian Jews to accept the offer of Ottoman citizenship and to enlist in the Ottoman army.[10] Renton argues that the Balfour Declaration was not particularly focused on British strategic interests in the Near East, but rather

[9] Renton, *Zionist Masquerade*, 85.
[10] Segev, *One Palestine*, 16.

was primarily concerned with winning the hearts and minds of American Jews in support of American involvement in the Great War. And yet Renton's approach is not incompatible with an exploration of the religious dimension affecting the Balfour Declaration, as his interpretation stresses "the degree to which the culture of policy-makers, the world-views through which they perceived reality, determined their political choices and strategy."[11]

If we are to understand the Protestant religious culture in the backgrounds of many of those responsible for issuing the Balfour Declaration, we have to delve into the ethos of the mid-Victorian era and in particular into the mindset of Victorian evangelicalism. As Eitan Bar-Yosef has observed "it has become a commonplace to see the Balfour Declaration as the culmination of a rich tradition of Christian Zionism in British culture: a tradition which emerged in the seventeenth century, slumbered in the eighteenth and re-emerged, with a vengeance, in the nineteenth." But as he also points out, "it has proved extremely difficult to assess the actual circulation or influence of these ideas" in Victorian Britain.[12] Bar-Yosef is surely right to distinguish between the highly committed students of biblical prophecy and a more general and diffused "Sunday-School" interest in the Jews. As Sarah Kochav suggests, however, the two are linked. The former focused on concepts derived from a literal reading of Scripture; the latter tended to retain images that such readings had created, while also often moving from a literal to a metaphorical interpretation of Scripture.

Lloyd George, in his speech to the Jewish Historical Society, never mentions any concern with biblical prophecy but only the impact of his day- and Sunday-school training. However, it is clear that this training was the product of a distinctly Protestant reading of the Bible and influenced deeply by what Bar-Yosef has called a "vernacular biblical culture."[13] This reflected the fact that Victorian England was overwhelmingly both Christian and Protestant, and most deeply influenced by that expression of Protestantism known as "evangelicalism," which greatly valued the study of the Bible by the individual Christian. The evangelicals were largely responsible for the phenomenon of Sunday schools which, beginning in the 1780s, provided working-class children with literacy and helped to create the demand for universal public education by 1870. The masses of Victorian England thereby came to share common hymns, doctrines, images, and practices and – especially important – acquired a shared Biblical vocabulary that was both ubiquitous and

[11] Renton, *Zionist Masquerade*, 5.
[12] Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture, 1799–1917* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005), 183.
[13] Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture*, 11.

elastic. This work seeks to map and explore the contours of this evangelical mindset and thereby account for the distinctive influence that this religious culture had on popular attitudes to the Jews, and particularly on the idea of their "restoration" to Palestine. In setting out the background, the first chapter of this book explores briefly how the idea of a return of the Jews became prominent in Calvinist thinking – especially among the English Puritans – in the seventeenth century. The idea of Jewish "restoration" was strong in both Britain and colonial America in the seventeenth century, but went into decline in the eighteenth century and then burst on the scene with new vigour beginning in the 1790s – first in Britain and then in America.

The main body of this work then seeks to explore the origins and significance of Christian Zionism as it emerged in nineteenth-century Britain, in an effort to understand why Christian support for the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was so prevalent in Victorian Britain and how this forms an important part of the background to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. This resurgence of Christian Zionism occurred well before the emergence of modern Zionism as a political force in the Jewish world. Central to the argument of the book is that an understanding of Victorian Christian Zionism is essential if we are to understand the religious impulses that influenced the Balfour Declaration. In focusing on Christian Zionism, this work examines the broader theme of philosemitism characteristic of so much of nineteenth-century English-speaking evangelicalism and then traces the impact of this impulse on nineteenth-century Palestine and Jews in the West. It tries to account for why these emphases emerged in the nineteenth century and what role philosemitism and Christian Zionism played within evangelicalism. The scepticism of Jewish scholars who look for a self-serving, recondite explanation of both evangelical philosemitism and Christian Zionism is understandable, and it is hoped that this work will help make sense of these puzzling aspects of evangelical Protestant attitudes toward the Jews.

In *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840–1939,* William and Hilary Rubinstein have argued that Gentile philosemitism has largely been dismissed out of hand by Jewish scholars or marginalized in modern accounts of Jewish history.[14] Paul Merkley goes further and suggests that "anti-evangelical prejudice" is at work amongst some contemporary American Jewish leaders, which serves to obscure the issues.[15] Gentile philosemitism and Christian Zionism both need to be better

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[14] William Rubinstein and Hilary Rubinstein, *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840–1939* (London: MacMillan Press, 1999), ix.

[15] Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes towards the State of Israel* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2001), 219.
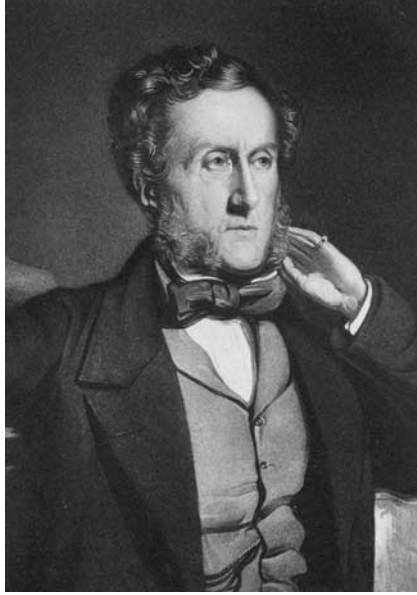
2. Lord Shaftesbury.

Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801–1885) was known by the title Lord Ashley until he succeeded his father as the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury in 1851. A philanthropist and social reformer, Shaftesbury is best known for leading the movement for improving conditions in factories and collieries. He labored ceaselessly on behalf of the underprivileged and marginalized – especially the most desperately poor, laboring women, exploited children, and the insane – and did more than anyone else in the Victorian era to create the concept of social welfare. A memorial in his honor was erected in Piccadilly Circus in London in 1893. Although popularly known as "Eros," the figure atop the monument was intended to represent "The Angel of Christian Charity."

understood, and an appreciation of their origins is the place to begin. In terms of approach, this work seeks to study these themes primarily through an examination of the life and career of Anthony Ashley Cooper, the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–85)[16] (**Figure 2**). Shaftesbury is well known as the leading social reformer of the Victorian era, working for the regulation

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[16] Anthony Ashley Cooper was known as Lord Ashley until he succeeded his father as the seventh Earl of Shaftesbury in 1851. Throughout this book, I will follow the convention of referring to him as Lord Shaftesbury; references to his father will be to the sixth Earl of Shaftesbury.

of working conditions in factories and mines, for protection of women and
children from exploitation, for sanitary legislation and for humane treat-
ment of the insane – among many other causes.[17] He is also the best-known
lay representative of Victorian evangelicalism; it is less appreciated that he
was widely acknowledged as the leading Christian Zionist of the nineteenth
century.

 The themes of Christian philosemitism and Christian Zionism are the
central concerns of this book. It is the contention of this work that only by
understanding these two phenomena can one make sense of the religious
and cultural influences that worked together to create a climate of opinion
among the political elite of Britain that was well disposed to the Balfour
Declaration. These two themes cannot be properly understood without
examining three issues related to the development of British evangelical-
ism in the early nineteenth century. The three include (1) the development
of evangelical identity; (2) the evangelicals' relationship to power, and spe-
cifically to British exercise of power in the development of the empire; and
(3) the cultural impact of the evangelicals. Central to this book's thesis is
the contention that by the middle of the nineteenth century philosemitism
and Christian Zionism became important "identity markers" for large num-
bers of British evangelicals. We must therefore, at the outset, signal clearly
how the terms "evangelical" and "evangelicalism" are being used. The ori-
gins of the term are to be found in the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning
"good news" or "gospel" that is used frequently in the New Testament to
describe the proclamation of Christ, and sometimes to refer to the first four
books of the New Testament (the four gospels). In the sixteenth century,
the term "evangelical" was applied to many advocating reformation of the
church along Protestant lines. (To add to the confusion, the term "evangeli-
cal" in the German-speaking world has come to mean "Protestant"; it has
a different meaning in the English-speaking world and this often leads to
confusion.)[18] In the early 1700s, however, a new phenomenon emerged in the
English-speaking world: a popular movement that shared many characteris-
tics of earlier Protestant reform movements but that was unique and had its
own sources of inspiration and its own transdenominational character.

[17] On Shaftesbury's social reform achievements, see Geoffrey B. A. M. Finlayson, *Seventh
   Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: Metheun, 1981) and G. F. A. Best, *Shaftesbury* (New York:
   Arco, 1964).
[18] An example of this confusion can be seen in Yaakov Ariel's otherwise excellent pamphlet
   "Philosemites or Antisemites?: Evangelical Christian Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism and
   the State of Israel," *Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism Series 20* (Jerusalem: Vidal
   Sasson Center, 2005), 9.