

Melanie Phillips: "The Demoralisation of Britain: Moral Relativism, the Church of England and the Jews"

British Jews today find themselves beleaguered to an extent they would have thought impossible a few decades ago.

In 2006, the Parliamentary Committee on Antisemitism said that violence, desecration of property, and intimidation directed towards Jews was on the rise and that as a result British Jews were now 'more anxious and more vulnerable to abuse and attack than at any other time for a generation or longer'.ⁱ

Violent assaults on Jewish people have reached record levels.ⁱⁱ Jewish schools are fitted with anti-shatter glass and reinforced walls. All Jewish communal events have to be guarded, and British Jews have been forced to form their own security organisation, the CST, since the threat is too great for the police to handle.

Most British Jews, it must be emphasised, live free of any physical threat. Arguably worse is the state of psychic siege in which many now feel they are living as a result of virulent anti-Israel and anti-Jewish attitudes, particularly among the intelligentsia and middle classes. A poll by the American Anti-Defamation League in 2007 revealed that half of all respondents believed it was 'probably true that 'Jews are more loyal to Israel than their own country', a rise of 28 per cent in two years; 22 per cent believed it was 'probably true'; that 'Jews have too much power in the business world' compared to 14 per cent who believed this two years previously; and 34 per cent agreed that 'American Jews control US foreign policy'.ⁱⁱⁱ

The belief that the Jews have too much power which they use covertly to disadvantage everyone else – an ancient prejudice which would never have been considered acceptable two decades ago – is now a commonplace. Much of this focuses upon Israel and an alleged Jewish conspiracy, headed by neo-conservatives, stretching from Jerusalem to Washington to subvert US foreign policy in the interests of Israel and put the rest of the world in danger.

In 2002, the New Statesman magazine printed an investigation into the power of the 'Zionist' lobby in Britain, which it dubbed the 'Kosher Conspiracy' and illustrated by a cover depicting a gold Star of David piercing the union flag.^{iv} conveying the message that rich Jews were stabbing British interests through their national heart.

In 2003 the Labour backbencher Tam Dalyell claimed that Tony Blair was 'being unduly influenced by a cabal of Jewish advisers'.^v The Liberal Democrat politician Jenny Tonge, who was honoured by her party with a peerage after sympathising with suicide bombers and comparing Arabs in Gaza to Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, told her party conference in 2006: 'The pro-Israel lobby has got its grips on the

Western world its financial grips. I think they've probably got a certain grip on our party.'^{vi}

A distinguished general told me (without a shred of evidence) that Rupert Murdoch had ordered that opposition to the Iraq war in the Times newspaper should be drastically limited 'on the instruction of the Jewish lobby in America'. Furthermore, claimed this general, George Bush had invaded Iraq because 'he had Ariel Sharon's hand up his back'.

In the Guardian last year, Geoffrey Wheatcroft lamented the fact that the British Conservative party leader David Cameron had fallen under the spell of neo-conservatives with their 'ardent support for the Iraq war, for the US and for Israel' and urged Cameron to ensure that British foreign policy was no longer based on the interest of 'another country' – Israel.^{vii}

Even the Darwinist superstar Richard Dawkins has got in on the act, saying:

'When you think about how fantastically successful the Jewish lobby has been, though, in fact, they are less numerous I am told - religious Jews anyway - than atheists and [yet they] more or less monopolise American foreign policy as far as many people can see. So if atheists could achieve a small fraction of that influence, the world would be a better place.'^{viii}

There has always been anti-Jewish feeling in Britain. But after Auschwitz it became not respectable. Now it is again mainstream. This revival of crude anti-Jewish libels is being fuelled and legitimised by the obsessive vilification and demonisation of Israel. It was hatred of Israel that drove Tony Blair out of office early, coming on top of the huge opposition to the Iraq war -- itself arising from the belief that the real root of Muslim rage was Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, backed by an America which was itself in the grip of the Jewish lobby.

It is hard to exaggerate the effect this anti-American and anti-Israel hysteria has had on British politics. In 2007, four British trade unions passed Israel boycott motions. The default position amongst the intelligentsia is that Israel is the pariah of the Middle East, a rogue state and regional bully practising the racist oppression of the Palestinians.

Zionism has become a dirty word, seen instead as a doctrine of territorial conquest and colonial subjugation. People openly say it would have been better had Israel never been created in the first place.

Tyranny around the world – such as the 20-year genocide in southern Sudan, or the persecution of Christians in Africa or Asia – goes almost unreported. Yet Israel is dwelt upon obsessively, held to standards of behaviour expected of no other country

and, with its own victimisation glossed over or ignored altogether, falsely accused of imposing wanton suffering.

Influential NGOs such as Save the Children, Oxfam or Christian Aid whip up hatred by putting out a steady stream of highly unbalanced and unfair claims about Israeli repression, along with a wholly misleading account of Jewish history which fails to acknowledge that the Jews are the *only* people for whom Israel was its national home – while ignoring or sanitising Palestinian Arab aggression.

The result is the equation of Israel with the Nazis. When the National Union of Journalists voted last April to boycott Israeli goods (a move which has since been reversed) one of its members, writer Pamela Hardyment, described Israel as ‘a wonderful Nazi-like killing machine backed by the world’s richest Jews’ and referred to the ‘so-called Holocaust’ before concluding: ‘Shame on all Jews, may your lives be cursed.’^{ix}

A senior Conservative MP, Sir Peter Tapsell, claimed during the Lebanon war that Blair was colluding with President Bush ‘in giving Israel the go-ahead’ to commit ‘a war crime gravely reminiscent of the Nazi atrocity on the Jewish quarter of Warsaw.’ The Daily Telegraph repeated the libel by publishing a cartoon depicting two scenes of devastation, one captioned ‘Warsaw 1943’ and the other ‘Tyre 2006.’

Yet there is widespread denial that there is a resurgence of antisemitism at all. The reason is that people think of antisemitism as a prejudice towards Jews as people and believe that this died with Hitler. The argument that attitudes to Israel may be anti-Jew strikes them therefore as absurd because they think you can’t be antisemitic about a country.

It is important to grasp that antisemitism is not just a prejudice but has unique characteristics. It applies to the Jews expectations applied to no other people; it libels, vilifies, demonises and dehumanises them; it scapegoats them not merely for crimes they have not committed but of which they are in fact the victims; it holds them responsible for all the ills of the world.

The misrepresentation of Israel exhibits precisely the same unique characteristics. Antisemitism has simply mutated once again from prejudice against Jews as people to prejudice against Jews as a people. The open hostility towards Israel’s actual existence and even towards Zionism singles out the Jews alone as having no right to assert their own peoplehood. Yet Jewish peoplehood, the Jewish religion and the land of Israel are the three legs of the tripod of Jewish identity. The attack on Zionism and Israel’s existence is an attack on the Jewish people.

Yet the implication is that British Jews can't be truly British if they take Israel's side. Only those Jews who denounce or renounce Israel are to be fully accepted as British; those British Jews who defend Israel against the onslaught stand accused, either implicitly or to their face, of 'dual loyalty'.

For the first time, many British Jews find themselves referred to as outsiders in their own country. They are no longer included in 'we'; they have become 'you'. They are accused of being driven by Jewish loyalty to the exclusion of all else, and of sanitising the crimes of Israel by sheltering behind the claim of antisemitism. And when they point out the antisemitism behind the frenzied scapegoating of Israel and the claims of covert Jewish power, they are told that such claims merely prove the point that Jews always try to rig the agenda to their advantage by false claims of victimisation. So to protest at the libel is merely to 'prove' that it is true.

Many British Jews are bewildered by this turn of events which is seen as an incomprehensible aberration. Until recently, they viewed Britain as the most benign environment in the world for Jews. But history shows us that the relationship is far more complex.

Jew-hatred has very deep roots in Britain. From Chaucer to Shakespeare to Dickens to TS Eliot and beyond, English culture is responsible for some of the most enduring anti-Jewish stereotypes in western culture. Central to the creation of these stereotypes was Christianity, the belief that the Jews were the killers of Christ condemned in perpetuity and exiled as a result from the love of God to become the party of the devil.

In many ways, Britain is today a post-Christian society, priding itself on its rationalism and freedom from obscurantism and prejudice. And yet it is among the most supposedly progressive and enlightened people in Britain, the secular rationalists and most liberal Christians who march under the banner of human rights and high-minded conscience, that one finds the most virulent hatred of Israel and medieval prejudice towards the Jews.

To disentangle this puzzle, we have to start from the premise that antisemitism is the eternal hatred. It never dies, for reasons which are outside the scope of this discussion. The best we can hope for is the existence of protection mechanisms that keep it down.

When we look at the history of the Jews in Britain, we can see that while the default position was general anti-Jewish prejudice, there were periods when the Jews enjoyed tranquillity -- not because such prejudice had vanished, but because protection mechanisms of one kind or another came into play.

In the twelfth century, the two King Henrys granted a measure of protection to the Jews, but with the Crusades it was then open season for slaughter.^x In the 17th century Oliver Cromwell and in the 19th century the evangelical Christian Zionists such as Lord Shaftesbury or George Eliot similarly provided a measure of protection, but against a prejudice they nevertheless were forced to fight and which never went away. Indeed, anti-Jewish feeling persisted up to and even into the Second World War; in the 1930s, anti-Jewish sentiment along with a mood of appeasement towards Nazi Germany was remarkably similar to the situation today. When the enormity of the Holocaust was revealed, however, that prejudice went sharply underground. You could say therefore that the fact of the Holocaust provided a measure of protection from overt anti-Jewish feeling. But now that protection has disappeared. So why has this happened?

One clue lies in what happened in Palestine under the British Mandate. This is Britain's unfinished dirty business. Contrary to popular opinion, Britain did not bring the State of Israel into being. On the contrary – despite the pledge made in the Balfour Declaration, and despite being given the mandate in 1920 to recreate within Palestine the Jewish national home, the history of that mandate is a story of the systematic betrayal of that pledge.

Britain's changing perception of its own national interest in the region led it to appease the Arabs by restricting the Jewish immigration it had promised to facilitate – thus swelling the death toll of the Holocaust -- while turning a blind eye to illegal Arab immigration and suggesting a further division of the remaining fragment of Palestine, most of which it had already given away to the Hashemite dynasty in 1921 to create Transjordan, into a state for the Jews and a state for the Arabs. Eventually, Britain abstained in the 1947 UN vote to bring Israel into being; and the anger at Jewish terrorism, the perception that Britain had been humiliated in Palestine and the belief that Britain had been embroiled in an unnecessary and damaging project left a reservoir of deep and lasting public resentment.^{xi}

The impact of the Holocaust, however, buried that resentment along with conventional anti-Jewish feeling which went underground. In its early years, Israel basked in Britain's approval because it fitted the spirit of the age. As Europe emerged from the horrors of the war, Israel was in effect hope reborn, a young idealistic country run on socialist principles and making the desert bloom. But when the skies darkened and Israel became embroiled in an apparently never-ending messy new kind of warfare in which the Arabs could pain Israelis as brutal occupiers and themselves as victims, the mood sharply changed. The resentful memory of the Mandate and the belief formed during that time that a Jewish state would only bring trouble was given new and virulent life. And the reasons for that could not be more profound. They relate to what has happened to Britain itself.

Since 1945, Britain has fundamentally changed. The Palestine debacle was an important milestone in the collapse of the British empire, which in turn helped bring about a collapse of belief in Britain itself and what it stood for. During the past six decades, Britain has been systematically hollowing out its own culture, for two intimately related reasons: a loss of its national identity and purpose, and the crumbling of religious belief that underpinned its moral codes.

With the loss of Britain's imperial role, together with its near bankruptcy after the Second World War and its reliance on American money to bale it out, the country's elite class was profoundly demoralised -- a state of mind which culminated in the shattering humiliation of the Suez crisis of 1956, when a secret plot by Britain, France and Israel to invade Egypt after Nasser seized the Suez Canal was aborted when America's President Eisenhower pulled the financial plug on the operation.^{xii}

This demoralisation left Britain's elites intensely vulnerable to ideas suggesting the emergence of a new kind of world altogether -- the new Jerusalem. And this was to be an utter repudiation of the old Jerusalem -- a secular onslaught against Biblical morality and its replacement by the religion of the self: hyper-individualism fuelled by rampant consumerism.

This secularism has eroded the principles which underpin western civilisation. Chief among these is the concept of truth or objectivity, which western intellectuals have now declared defunct in favour of the subjective notion of moral relativism, or truth-for-me -- otherwise known as 'anything goes'.

As a result, people are increasingly unable to make moral distinctions based on behaviour. This erasing of the difference between right and wrong has meant in turn that people who *do* wrong -- if they tick certain boxes -- may be viewed with sympathy while their actual victims are held responsible for their offence.

This march of secularism has opened the door to the British and European left, which demonises America and western capitalism and lionises the third world and all liberation movements. With the fall of communism, the left's focus shifted from economics to issues of culture, race, ethnic identity and the nation state. It was Antonin Gramsci, the Marxist thinker who became the guru of the former sixties radicals who now run western society, who promoted the idea that western society could be overturned by capturing the citadels of the culture -- the universities, schools, churches, media, civil service, professions -- and subverting its values.

Enacting Gramsci's precepts to the letter, morality and culture have indeed been turned upside down. The values of marginalised or transgressive groups have been substituted for the values of the majority and their historic culture. The authority of the Bible has been repudiated for a culture of rights, leading Britain's intelligentsia to

embrace post-modernism, anti-racism, feminism and gay rights. The crucial point is that these are all part of a victim culture which does *not* seek to extend tolerance to marginalised groups, but instead to transfer power to such groups to destroy the very idea of a normative majority culture rooted in the morality of Christianity and the Hebrew Bible.

Christians are now targeted as bigots if they uphold Christian beliefs about sexuality. An elderly evangelical Christian who was attacked after he held up a poster calling for an end to homosexuality, lesbianism and immorality, was convicted in 2002 of a public order offence – while his attackers were not prosecuted on the grounds that *they* were the victims of the offence.^{xiii} A Christian registrar was threatened with the sack after asking to be excused from conducting civil partnerships for same-sex couples because of her religious beliefs, although she later won the right to do so.^{xiv} And the Catholic church was forced to cut its ties with three large adoption agencies because equality law forces such agencies to place children for adoption with gay couples.^{xv}

With western culture deemed illegitimate because it is intrinsically oppressive, only multiculturalism is a legitimate basis for national identity. This holds that all minority values must have equal status to those of the majority. Any attempt to uphold majority values over minorities is a form of prejudice. That turns minorities into a cultural battering ram to destroy the very idea of majority culture at all.

With racism defined on Marxist principles as prejudice with power, it follows that minorities or the third world can never be anything other than victims, while the west or those with power can only ever be the victimiser. That's why the Jews, who are seen as running western capitalism, and Israel, which has nuclear weapons, are not seen as victims. Since suicide bombings are carried out by the powerless Palestinians, these must instead be the fault of their all-powerful Israeli targets. So when Muslims and Arabs invert right and wrong, truth and lies, victim and victimiser in their story about the Middle East, instead of challenging this as a big lie the British intelligentsia endorses, absorbs and reproduces it.

Britain has not only lost belief in itself as a nation, but European liberals have turned against the very idea of the nation itself. Rooted in the particulars of history, religion, law, language and tradition, the nation is seen as the cause of all the ills of the world, from prejudice to war. That's why supra-national institutions such as the UN, EU, International Court of Justice, International Criminal Court and the international and human rights law which they have invented, are held to be more legitimate than the structures of individual democracies.

So for these transnational progressives, the very idea of a Jewish state is double anathema. Britain's part in creating it is seen as an example of a wholly discredited colonialism, part of Britain's original sin which has to be expiated through the creation of a transnational and multicultural world. It is surely no accident that the Jews find themselves at the centre of this convulsion. It was the Jews who first gave the west those moral codes that underpin its civilisation and which are now under siege.

With most people in Britain ignorant of the history of the Middle East and of the Jews, this moral and intellectual vacuum has been filled by Arab propaganda painting Israeli victims as victimisers and their Palestinian attackers as their victims. This process has gained extra traction from the large numbers of Muslims who have immigrated into Britain and Europe, which has led to a craven desire to appease Muslim extremism by accepting many of its premises.

This repudiation of western values has become the default position of the intelligentsia and middle classes, shifting the political centre of gravity in Britain – resulting in the almost total capture of the high-minded, who now embrace secular bigotry under the banner of human rights.

This wholesale demoralisation of Britain's governing class has another particularly important feature. In America the evangelical churches – the descendants of British Puritans and other nonconformists – provide a solid bulwark against the attack on western values and on Israel and the Jews. In Britain, by contrast, the Church of England has been in the forefront of the onslaught. In sermons and speeches, through Christian charities and newspapers, on broadcasting 'God slots' and in books and pamphlets Christian clerics and thinkers systematically misrepresent Israel's history and libel its behaviour, while sanitising the murderous crimes against it by the Arabs.^{xvi}

In 2003 the Archbishop of Wales, Dr Barry Morgan, said in a lecture on the relationship between religion and violence:

'Messianic Zionism came to the fore after the Six Day War in 1967 when "Biblical territories were reconquered", and so began a policy of cleansing the Promised Land of all Arabs and non-Jews rather than co-existing with them'.^{xvii}

But there has been no such Israeli 'cleansing' at all in the disputed territories. The only attempt at 'cleansing' has been the Palestinian attempt to kill as many Israelis as possible. The same archbishop eulogised upon the death of Yasser Arafat:

'Yasser Arafat has given his life to the cause of the Palestinian people and will be remembered for his perseverance and resolve in the face of so many challenges and

set-backs. When I heard the news of his death this morning, my initial reaction was to pray that in death Yasser Arafat will find that peace which only God can give and which was denied him in life.^{xviii}

In June 2005, a report by the Anglican Peace and Justice Network – which underpinned a short-lived move to ‘divest’ from companies supporting Israel – compared Israel’s security barrier to ‘the barbed-wire fence of the Buchenwald camp’. Thus the Anglicans compared Jews to Nazis – on account of a measure aimed to prevent a second Jewish Holocaust.^{xix}

This report and its recommendations were officially adopted in June 2005 by the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), which in turn recommended to Anglican provinces worldwide a policy of disinvestment from companies ‘supporting the occupation’ of Palestinian lands.^{xx} On February 6, 2006, the Anglican General Synod backed overwhelmingly a call from the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East to disinvest from ‘companies profiting from the illegal occupation’ of Palestinian territories.^{xxi} Lord Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, had described the previous disinvestment plea by the ACC in September 2005 as ‘another knife in the back’ for Israel.^{xxii} Following the Synod’s decision, Lord Carey declared that he was “ashamed to be an Anglican.”^{xxiii} The Church’s Ethical Investment Advisory Group later rejected the Synod’s decision.^{xxiv}

Shortly before Christmas 2006 the Archbishop of Canterbury, talking about the flight of Palestinian Christians from Bethlehem, blamed this on Israeli policies and the security barrier and asked rhetorically:

‘I would like to know how much it matters to the Israeli Government to have Christian communities in the Holy Land. Are they an embarrassment or are they part of a solution? That’s a question.’^{xxv}

Dr Williams did not mention that Bethlehem’s Christians were fleeing a Muslim administration. He did not mention that all over the world Christians were being persecuted by Muslims.^{xxvi} He did not mention that the only country in the Middle East where Christians were thriving and their numbers significantly increasing was Israel. And he did not ask himself why, if the flight of Bethlehem’s Christians was indeed caused by Israel’s behaviour, Bethlehem’s Muslims had not similarly been driven out but had actually increased in number.

The context for this virulent animosity towards Israel is that, like the secular establishment, the church has lost faith in its own core message. As the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Carey, has put it: ‘Britain’s unthinking secularism is the context for the Church’s attitudes, shapeless form and its lack of any underpinning values.’^{xxvii} And so the church has embraced moral and cultural

relativism. The prevailing view, as one bishop observed, is that 'there is no one truth, and we all have to respect each other's truths'.^{xxviii}

Just as a collapse of confidence in Britain's purpose among the secular establishment made it receptive to cultural Marxism, so a collapse of confidence in its own core beliefs made the Church of England receptive to exactly the same secular faith.

So belief in God and in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity were replaced by worship of social liberalism. The church stopped trying to save people's souls and instead started trying to change society. It signed up to the prevailing doctrine of the progressive class that the world's problems were caused by poverty, oppression and discrimination. Miracles were replaced by Marx.

Accordingly, it soaked up the radical message coming out of the World Council of Churches, under the influence of liberation theology, that the problems of the poor peoples of the south were social and economic and emanated from the capitalist west and America in particular. At home, absorbing the prevailing utilitarianism which preached the creed of lifestyle choice, the Church came to believe that it too was in the business of delivering the greatest happiness to the greatest number. So it went with the flow of permissiveness, supporting the liberalisation of abortion, homosexuality and divorce. And as post-moral Britain demanded that ever more constraints be knocked away, the Church was forced further and further into hollowing out its own identity.

As it renounced its own culture it embraced others, while never ceasing to grovel for its one-time crime of believing in itself. As secular society denounced the crimes of British cultural and political imperialism, so the Church of England abased itself for its own crime of religious imperialism. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, apologised for bringing Christianity to the world. Addressing the Anglican conference in Cairo in 2005, he said that the Church had taken 'cultural captives' by exporting hymns and liturgies to remote parts of the world.^{xxix} The fact that Christianity had brought civilisation to these remote parts of the world, for the very good reason that it was superior to practices in those parts, was not acknowledged. For the implicit assumption was that Christian values are trumped by the belief that everyone's culture is of equal value.

In similar vein Dr Williams, has responded to Islamist terrorism with repeated examples of moral equivalence and appeasement. In *Writing in the Dust*, a meditation he wrote after 9/11 when he was still Archbishop of Wales, he wrote of the west:

'...we have something of the freedom to consider whether or not we turn to violence and so, in virtue of that very fact, are rather different from those who experience their world as leaving them no other option'.^{xxx}

So according to this, Islamists were driven to mass murder because they had 'no other option'. He also observed of the Palestinian/Israeli deadlock that 'both sides know what it is to be faced with regular terror' and that 'the Muslim world is now experiencing – as it has for some time, but now with so much more intensity – that "conscriptio" into someone else's story that once characterised the Church's attitude to Jews.'^{xxxi}

Dr Williams's prose style is famously opaque. But the future leader of the Anglican communion appeared to be saying that Israeli self-defence against terror was morally equivalent to that terror, that attitudes to Muslims in the wake of 9/11 were morally equivalent to the Church's persecution of the Jews, and that 9/11 had happened because its perpetrators couldn't help themselves.

And in 2004, he chose one of the major seats of Islamic learning, Al Azhar University in Cairo, to mark the anniversary of 9/11 by saying that people should not take the action that might be necessary to prevent themselves and others from being murdered, characterising such acts of self-defence as 'revenge':

'So whenever a Muslim, a Christian or a Jew refuses to act in violent revenge, creating terror and threatening or killing the innocent, that person bears witness to the true God. They have stepped outside the way the faithless world thinks'.^{xxxii}

But of course, Christians and Jews do not use 'indiscriminate violence and terror' against Muslims; it is Muslims who are indiscriminately murdering Christians and Jews. Condemning self-defence or the defence of others against murder as 'revenge' or 'indiscriminate violence and terror' condemns the innocent to death in the guise of godliness. It implies that, if the Nazi Holocaust were to happen again, the Church would once again stand aside. In the current war being waged against the west, the head of the Anglican church is telling it to turn the other cheek.

The way in which the church scapegoats Israel is uncomfortably reminiscent of the historic scapegoating of the Jews for the death of Christ. This is no accident. Because of its close involvement with the World Council of Churches, liberation theology and inter-faith dialogue, the church has been heavily influenced by Palestinian 'liberation' theology. This in turn has kick-started replacement theology. 'replacement theology', sometimes known also as 'supercessionism', the doctrine going back to the early church fathers which stated that all God's promises to the Jews – including the land of Israel – were forfeit because the Jews had denied the divinity of Christ and so the Jews were consigned to the party of the devil.

This doctrine lay behind centuries of Christian anti-Jewish hatred until the Holocaust drove it underground. Now it's back, because Palestinian Christian revisionism states falsely that the Palestinian Arabs were the original possessors of the land of Israel. Thus the former Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, Riah Abu El-Assal, claimed of Palestinian Christians:

'We are the true Israel... no-one can deny me the right to inherit the promises, and after all the promises were first given to Abraham and Abraham is never spoken of in the Bible as a Jew... He is the father of the faithful.'^{xxxiii}

In a lecture in 2001, Canon Andrew White, the church's former envoy to the Middle East and now Vicar of Baghdad, observed that Palestinian politics and Christian theology had become inextricably intertwined. The Palestinians were viewed as oppressed and the Church had to fight their oppressor. 'Who is their oppressor? The State of Israel. Who is Israel? The Jews. It is they therefore who must be put under pressure so that the oppressed may one day be set free to enter their "Promised Land" which is being denied to them.'^{xxxiv}

The Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem, run by Father Naim Ateek who is a close friend of many senior Anglican bishops, is a crucial source of systematic demonisation of the Jewish state. Using the Bible to delegitimise Israel by misrepresenting the Jews' relationship with God his book, *Justice and Only Justice*, inverts history, defames the Jews and sanitises Arab violence. Modern anti-Semitism gets precisely one paragraph; Zionism is portrayed as an aggressive colonial adventure. Courageous Jews are those who confess to 'moral suicide' and who say that Judaism should survive without a state; real antisemitism, says Ateek, is found within the Jewish community in its treatment of the Palestinians.^{xxxv}

Elsewhere, Ateek has recycled and redirected the charge of deicide against the Jews. In December 2000, he wrote that Palestinian Christmas celebrations were 'marred by the destructive powers of the modern-day "Herods" in the Israeli government.' In his 2001 Easter message, he wrote: 'The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily. Palestine has become one huge Golgotha. Palestine has become the place of the skull.' And, in a sermon in February 2001, he likened the Israeli occupation to the boulder sealing Christ's tomb. With these three images, Ateek has figuratively blamed Israel for trying to kill the infant Jesus, crucifying him and blocking the resurrection of Christ.

In 2005 Sabeel issued a liturgy titled 'The Contemporary Stations of the Cross' that equates Israel's founding with Jesus' death sentence and the construction of a security barrier with His death on the cross.^{xxxvi} So it was not surprising that at

Christmas churches up and down Britain have replaced their traditional manger scenes with tableaux featuring the security barrier, making an analogy between the suffering Jesus and the suffering Palestinians.^{xxxvii}

Sabeel and Ateek have many devoted adherents in the Church of England where their analysis is accepted as the norm. Stephen Sizer, the vicar of Christ Church, Virginia Water, is a leading crusader against Christian Zionism. As Margaret Brearley^{xxxviii} has written, his book, *Christian Zionism: Road-map to Armageddon?* is endorsed by many leading British and American bishops, theologians and Praising his book, for example, Prebendary Dick Lucas attacks the 'dubious theology and destructive consequences of Christian Zionism' and questions the validity of Jewish nationhood:

'God's continuing love for the Jewish people must not be confused with aspirations for an earthly kingdom which Jesus has already repudiated.'^{xxxix}

Sizer believes that God's promises to the Jews have been inherited by Christianity, including the land of Israel. He has acknowledged that Israel has the right to exist, since it was established by a United Nations resolution. But he has also said it is 'fundamentally an apartheid state because it is based on race', and 'even worse than South Africa' (this despite the fact that Israeli Arabs have the vote, they are members of the Knesset and one is even a Supreme Court judge). Asked whether Israel's existence could be justified, he replied that South African apartheid had been 'brought to an end internally by the rising up of the people'.

'The covenant between Jews and God', he stated, 'was conditional on their respect for human rights. The reason they were expelled from the land was that they were more interested in money and power and treated the poor and aliens with contempt.' Today's Jews, it appeared, were no better. 'In the United States, politicians dare not criticise Israel because half the funding for both the Democrats and the Republicans comes from Jewish sources.'^{xl}

Brearley notes that Sizer denies any validity to Judaism, quoting the leading Anglican evangelical, Rev. Dr. John Stott: 'to suggest... that the Jewish people continue to have a special relationship with God, apart from faith in Jesus... is, in the words of John Stott, "biblically anathema".'^{37xli}

A letter to the Prime Minister in 2004 about Iraq war, from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York backed by every diocesan, suffragan and assistant bishop in the Church of England, showed how deeply the Church's views about Iraq were dominated by the issue of Israel which they approached solely from the perspective of Arab and Muslim opinion. There was no mention in this letter of the rights of

Israel or the Jews as the principal victims of annihilatory aggression and prejudice. Instead, they wrote:

‘Within the wider Christian community we also have theological work to do to counter those interpretations of the Scriptures from outside the mainstream of the tradition which appear to have become increasingly influential in fostering an uncritical and one-sided approach to the future of the Holy Land.’^{xlii}

Their target was the Christian Zionists, regarded by the church with as much horror as the ‘Christian fundamentalists’ and the ‘Christian right’ who it believes hijacked American foreign policy; indeed, they are synonymous. Christians who support Israel take a variety of views about its policies, but these Anglicans see Christian Zionists as supporting an expansionist policy of ‘Greater Israel’ which would colonise the disputed territories – which the Anglicans see as ‘Palestinian’ – on the basis of the Biblical promise of the land made by God to the Jews. Indeed, for many Anglicans this aggressive form of Zionism *is* Zionism. They don’t believe there is any other form.

According to Canon Andrew White, replacement theology is dominant in the Church of England and present in almost every church, fuelling the venom against Israel.^{xliii} Lord Carey also agrees that replacement theology is the most important driver behind the Church’s hatred of Israel.^{xliv}

The essential problem, said White, was the lack of will in the Church to face the difference between Judaism and Islam.

‘They don’t want to recognise that their faith comes from Judaism,’ he said. ‘They talk instead of the ‘children of Abraham’ as if we are all in it together. The reality is, however, that although Islam and Judaism have a lot in common in terms of customs, they are as far apart as Christianity is from heathenism.’^{xlv}

This revival of replacement theology has achieved two results. The first is that the Church has lent its weight to the delegitimisation of Israel. The second is that this conflation of revisionist Christian theology with an Arab agenda has delivered a victory to the Islamists. A view which holds that the enemies of civilisation are not the Islamists but the Jews transfers righteous opposition from those who threaten the free world to their victims. And this feeds into and is in turn fed by the Church’s perverse desire at home to surrender to those who wish to obliterate Christianity from the British public sphere.

It is this visceral and ancient hostility within the church and the society it has shaped that helps explain why we are living through this hallucinatory level of anti-Israel and anti-Jew animosity. Contrary to those who think the church no longer matters,

its influence is of the greatest possible significance. Even in our post-religious age, it still punches far above its weight in setting the moral benchmarks for British society and culture.

That influence is now being used to promote once again a pre-Holocaust demonology of the Jewish people, expressed this time as hatred of Israel. It is conventional wisdom that opinion turned against Israel when David turned into Goliath after 1967. But that does not begin to explain the frenzied, obsessional nature of the hatred. Why do Israel's enemies care so much?

I believe this is the expression of a complex combination of prejudice against the Jews *and* a profound, civilisational guilt over the way Christianity has perpetrated that prejudice -- a burden of guilt so unbearable that, led by the church itself, the Christian world *has to* turn the Jews into the architects of their own destruction.

In its early years, Israel basked in Britain's approval because it effectively redeemed the Holocaust. Not only had it risen from the ashes of Europe, it seemed to create a new kind of Jew altogether. The black-garbed moneylenders of stereotype had been replaced by fresh-faced young people in shorts making the desert bloom. With the old Jews of Europe firmly fixed in its mind as dead victims, Britain now saw instead plucky new Jews bravely fighting off the Arab Goliath. They were under attack, for sure - but they weren't victims. These tall bronzed young people planting orange groves meant Britain didn't have to feel guilty any more about Jewish suffering.

Even after Israel occupied the disputed territories in 1967 opinion did not significantly change. It was only when systematic Palestinian terror started and Israel then had to move in to contain it that the mood dramatically changed.

I believe this is because the sight of Jews in battledress and tanks putting down the wretched of the earth arouses in Christian Europe two overwhelming and visceral feelings. It revives the deep belief that the very existence of the Jews is an insult and a reproach to the essence of Christianity, which wishes deep down that the Jews would simply disappear. But second, *because* Christian Europe has done its best over the centuries to make that happen and is responsible for anti-Jewish bloodbaths down through the ages culminating in the Shoah, liberal Christians cannot accept that the Jews are locked in battle to prevent it happening again. It reminds them of their own historic behaviour. So it turns the Jews into the attackers, enabling it to condemn them and thus release itself from the guilt it feels over the Shoah.

That's why it calls the Israelis 'Nazis'. Relieved of its self-denying ordinance to suppress its anti-Jewish feelings, it can now use the image it creates of the Nazi Jew to slough off its own guilt. That's why the hatred explodes whenever Israel is attacked. So the more Israel and its supporters protest that the Jews are again the

victims of another attempted genocide – indeed, the more Israelis are attacked -- the more hostile Britain becomes.

This is a source of immense pain for the many decent Christians who are horrified by their church's attitude and understand very well where it is leading. But the bleak and terrible fact is that the Christian world has never and will never fight to defend the Jewish people. We saw this as Germany descended into barbarism and Britain into appeasement. We see it now in the public indifference over Iran.

Dexter van Zile, a Christian researcher for the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting, observes:

'Since extremist movements typically attack Jews first, they evoke feelings of guilt at precisely those moments in history when Western intellectuals and religious leaders need to think clearly. We saw this with Nazism and now we see it in response to Islamist extremism targeting Israel and the West. Progressive Christians cannot respond reasonably to the threats facing Western civilization because it reminds them of their own historical sins, which makes them think that their civilization is not worthy of a robust defense.'

In conclusion, Jews have always found themselves in difficulties whenever their host country loses confidence in itself. That is what has happened in Britain, which has upturned its founding values based on Christianity and the Hebrew Bible and no longer knows its own identity or purpose. The upsurge in anti-Jewish feeling centred upon the State of Israel is intimately connected to this cultural confusion.

Unfortunately, this looks set to get worse. Britain is now being targeted by radical Islamism which seeks to fill the cultural vacuum – and until now, the British establishment has been fatally attempting to appease it rather than uphold its own precepts. The danger is that, with public feeling against Islamism running ever higher, resentment at the collapse of national identity and a predominant attitude of 'a plague on all religions', British Jews may find themselves caught in the cross fire and assailed from all sides. It is not a comfortable place in which to be.

ends

ⁱ *Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism*, 2006

ⁱⁱ *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2007*; Community Security Trust

ⁱⁱⁱ *Attitudes Towards Jews and the Middle East in Six European Countries, July 2007*; Anti-Defamation League

^{iv} *New Statesman*, January 14 2002

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- v Colin Brown, *Sunday Telegraph*, May 4 2003
- vi Press Association newswire, October 13 2006
- vii Geoffrey Wheatcroft, *Guardian*, March 22 2007
- viii *Guardian*, October 1 2007
- ix Leo McKinstry, *Daily Express*, May 31 2007
- x Roth, *A History of the Jews in England*
- xi See for example Efraim Karsh, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Osprey, 2002; Howard M Sachar: *A History of Israel from the Rise of Zionism to our Present Time*, Knopf, 1976; Martin Gilbert, *Israel*, Black Swan, 1998
- xii See Corelli Barnett, *The Collapse of British Power*, Pan 2002
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- xiv *Daily Mail*, July 11 2008
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- xvi See for example successive issues of *Christian Aid News*; also *Facts on the Ground: The End of the Two-State Solution?* October 2004
- xvii Archbishop of Wales UNA lecture, November 20 2003
- xviii Press release, Church in Wales, November 11 2004
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- xx www.ecusa.anglican.org/3577_63218_ENG_HTM.htm
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- xxii *ibid*
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- xxviii Interview by author
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- xxxv Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice; A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, 1989
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- xlii Stephen Bates, *Guardian*, July 1 2004
- xliiii Interview by author
- xliv Canon Andrew White, Lord Carey, interviews with author
- xlv Interview by author