

**REVIEW**

Donald M. Lewis

*The Origins of Christian Zionism:  
Lord Shaftesbury and the Evangelical Support  
for a Jewish Homeland*

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In his book *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and the Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland*, Donald M. Lewis examines the “evangelical mindset” of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British Protestantism in order to “account for the distinctive influence that this religious culture had on popular attitudes to the Jews, and particularly on the idea of the ‘restoration’ to Palestine” (p. 8). He seeks to address “the skepticism of Jewish scholars who look for a self-serving, recondite explanation of both Evangelical philosemitism and Christian Zionism [and to] help make sense of these puzzling aspects of Evangelical Protestant attitudes toward the Jews” (ibid.). Lewis also promises to prove that, in contrast to the “Teaching of Contempt” that characterized the Roman Catholic Church at the time, Evangelical Protestants, and British Protestants in particular, promoted a “‘Teaching of Esteem’ toward the Jews,” which Lewis defines as identifying the Jews as God’s chosen people and “countering any mistreatment of Jews” (p. 12). Anthony Ashley Cooper (1801-1885), the seventh Lord Shaftesbury, was a philanthropist, social reformer, politician, and “the leading Christian Zionist of the nineteenth century” (p. 10). His life and career, therefore, provide a convenient frame for Lewis’ study.

In the first part of the book, “The Rise of British Evangelical Interest in the Jews,” Lewis presents a thorough and detailed exploration of the roots of philosemitism and restoration theology in Protestant thought, an area of European Protestant theology that, he says, scholars have largely ignored (p. 13). He then focuses on the specifically British expressions of this theology, especially the identification of both the British people and nation with ancient Israel. As God’s elect, Britain had an obligation to protect the original Chosen People and to facilitate their return to their ancestral homeland, an essential component of Evangelical eschatology, both pre- and post-millennial. This reflected not only a sense of British exceptionalism but also a strong vein of anti-Catholicism. Lewis states: “Philosemitism became an important marker of Evangelical identity and a way of further distinguishing Protestantism (apostolic Christianity) from its Roman Catholic and Tractarian counterfeits” (p. 102).

In the second part, “Shaftesbury and the Jews,” Lewis traces the career of Lord Shaftesbury, the development of his religious views toward the Jews, and his emergence as “one of the most important figures in British and indeed worldwide evangelicalism during the nineteenth century” (p. 107). As a popular Evangelical leader, he was able to influence public attitudes toward the Jews, and as a member of Parliament and the aristocracy, he could build on that public sympathy to influence British foreign policy to pressure the Ottomans on behalf of the Jews and Jerusalem. He encouraged the growing interest of the international community in the development of Jerusalem. By shaping both public opinion and government policy, he laid the foundation for British

attitudes toward Jewish nationalism that eventually led to the Balfour Declaration in 1917 (more than thirty years after Shaftesbury's death).

The third part of the book, "Evangelicals and Pietists Together: The Mission to the Jews of Palestine," focuses more directly on Shaftesbury's efforts in promoting both a Christian presence in Palestine and the return of the Jews. "Shaftesbury's three aims—a British consul in Jerusalem, an Anglican church, and a joint Anglican-Lutheran bishopric—were all achieved by 1849" (p. 313). The achievement of these goals was far from easy, given the political complexities of the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and the European powers, as well as those between the German Pietists and British Evangelicals, whose fragile coalition in the joint Jerusalem bishopric fell apart in 1885. Lewis contends that Protestant activity served as a catalyst for significant economic investment in the area, laying the groundwork for its continued growth. It also stimulated the involvement of Western Jews in supporting the Jewish community and Jewish institutions in Palestine. While Shaftesbury's efforts did not yield immediate results in terms of Jewish immigration, he remained committed to their restoration.

In the final section of the book, "Shaftesbury's Final Years," Lewis describes Shaftesbury's ongoing efforts on behalf of Jewish restoration and the continued influence of philosemitism on British foreign policy. Shaftesbury was particularly alarmed by the outbreak of anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia in 1881, and he led efforts to provide relief for the Jews and to mobilize public protest and political pressure on the Russian government. Toward the end of Shaftesbury's life and into the beginning of the 20th century, Evangelical interest in restoration waned, though its influence remained potent enough within British culture to affect the drafters of the Balfour declaration.

Lewis is most successful in his depiction of the evolution of philosemitism and Christian Zionism in European Protestantism and especially the interweaving of this theology with British self-identity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He is correct that the subject of philosemitism and Christian Zionism has not received the attention it deserves from scholars; this book is an important contribution to an under-appreciated phenomenon. His careful research is evident throughout the book. For example, in several instances he offers corrections to, and points out lacunae in, the published version of Shaftesbury's diaries.

Readers of this journal will be intrigued but ultimately disappointed by Lewis' provocative suggestion regarding a "Teaching of Esteem." Lewis demonstrates convincingly the interest in restoration among Evangelical Christians and makes some reference to action on behalf of Jews by Shaftesbury and his colleagues (e.g., during both the Damascus Blood Libel and the Russian pogroms). However, he does not delve into the nature of this "esteem" to consider questions such as the tension between "esteem" and the goal of the conversion of the Jews, nor does he consider whether this "esteem" extended to Judaism itself. Indeed, with some exceptions (e.g., Moses Montefiore), "real" Jews are mostly invisible in this book. Those who most regularly appear are Jewish converts to Christianity, whose influence on the development of philosemitism was substantial. What the Jews of Britain or Palestine thought of Shaftesbury and his efforts receive little attention. This underscores Lewis' contention, with which I concur, that the subject of philosemitism, especially when compared to antisemitism, has largely been ignored by the scholarly world. Thus, while Lewis might have explored these topics more fully, he has, at the very least, raised important questions that demand further investigation. In sum, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and the Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* is an important contribution to the study of Christian Zionism and Jewish-Christian relations.