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Christian Zionism - America's Dance with the Devil

Introduction

This is the second installment in a five-part serial on Christian Zionism in the United States. America's "dance with the devil" refers to the zeal – even the obsession – of millions of Americans concerning the state of Israel based on a false theology with a long and twisted history. The tragic consequences of Christian Zionism have now been playing out in both the spiritual and secular spheres for over a century. Spiritually, the Jews have become the target of Christian Zionists for conversion to any of numerous Protestant (i.e., heretical) sects. That said, the success rate of Jewish conversions to Christianity in any form over the centuries has been trivial. Indeed, the galvanizing figure in nineteenth century Christian Zionism – England's Lord Shaftesbury – was so disappointed in the results after years of Anglican missionary efforts that he once lamented, "Have we conceived a merely human project and then imagined it to be a decree of the Almighty?"^[1] The astonishing December 2015 Vatican statement which claims that the Catholic Church should not have an institutional mission to convert the Jews has now effectively cleared the playing field for Protestant denominations to pursue their missionary efforts.^[2] Meanwhile, in the secular realm, Christian Zionists have arguably hijacked American foreign policy over the past half century, effectively giving *carte blanche* to both immoral and dangerous actions by the state of Israel.

Last [week] in [Part One](#), we looked at the origins of Christian Zionism in England, which began within decades of Henry VIII's break with Rome. Thanks in large measure to the Puritans, who fancied themselves modern-day Jews fleeing the pharaoh-like English monarchy and state-sponsored Anglican Church, Christian Zionism spread early to the American colonies. We also examined the later crucial influence of Christian Zionism on British foreign policy. Britain's moment of triumph in the Middle East at the end of World War I steadily dissipated in just three decades into disaster and chaos within Palestine as the Jewish Zionist settlers showed their true colors vis-à-vis both British and Arab. We must

emphasize again that Christian Zionism, thanks to the influence of Lord Shaftesbury and other prominent Englishmen, *preceded* Jewish Zionism (the 1890s movement of Theodore Herzl) by a half century and enabled its fulfillment in the vacuum left by the convenient demise of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. As mentioned previously, this article is written as a companion piece to the three-part article entitled “Why is There a Gaza Strip?” published last year [2015] in *Catholic Family News*, which focused on the tragic history of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine.[\[3\]](#)

Here in Part Two, we will turn our attention to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and to the personalities and doctrinal tenets which permanently rooted Christian Zionism across many factions of American Protestantism. We will focus first on Edward Irving, the Scottish minister who popularized “pre-millennialism,” and on the Anglo-Irishman John Nelson Darby, who is widely regarded as the father of “dispensationalism.” We will also consider Darby’s key American disciples – James Brookes, Dwight L. Moody, Cyrus Scofield (publisher of the Scofield Reference Bible), and William Blackstone. Collectively, these men laid the theological groundwork for Christian Zionism as it exists today, including the canard of a “rapture” of faithful Christians before the second coming of Christ. In Parts Three through Five, we will address America’s “Dance with the Devil,” as Christian Zionism came to prominence with the founding of Israel in 1948, undermining traditional Christian doctrine, subverting American foreign policy, and portending disastrous consequences for Jews, Christians, and the world as a whole.

The Problem of the Millennium

Christian Zionism is intricately linked to beliefs about the millennium. The notion of a literal thousand year golden age is mentioned in only one chapter of the Bible – Revelation 20 – although it is typically read in context with the previous chapter. Over time, three interpretations have evolved concerning the meaning and timing of the millennium. First, if it in fact refers to a literal period of a thousand years, does it occur before or after the second coming of Christ? So-called *pre-millennialists* reply that Christ must come first, and the golden age will follow with Christ physically present to reign as king. However, the *post-millennialist* school supports the opposite view, i.e., the thousand years of bliss and peace will – somehow – occur as the result of the proclaiming of the kingdom of God by man and the accompanying work of the Holy Spirit. The second coming of Christ, the general resurrection of the dead, and the last judgment will all come at the end of the millennium. A third approach is known as *amillennialism* (the prefix “a-” meaning “not”), indicating that the Biblical concept of a thousand years is merely figurative language which indicates Christ’s current rule through His church on earth, or the “church militant” in Catholic parlance. After all, did not both the book of Psalms (90:4) and the first vicar of Christ (2nd

Peter 3:8) state that a thousand years are like a day? The *post-millennialist* position was prominent in the nineteenth century, consistent with the general optimism of the times. However, with the tragedies of two world wars and numerous other negative developments in the secular realm, the pessimistic alternative of *pre-millennialism* has held sway among Protestant evangelicals in recent times.

As for the Catholic position, the Church treats the millennium figuratively (as did the first Protestant reformers), although it has not spoken definitively on the issue. However, in the 1940s the Holy Office stated that *pre-millennialism* “cannot safely be taught.”^[4] Additionally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (676) notes that the Church “has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism,” meaning the *pre-millennialist* position. For the Catholic, there are at least two pernicious elements of *pre-millennialism*. First is the presumption in claiming to know the sequence and timing of the divine plan; did not Christ caution His apostles about predicting the future? (“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” (Mk 13:32)). Secondly, *pre-millennialism* implies a certain inability of Christians to “influence the action;” the world will continue its inevitable decline into evil and chaos, from which only the return of Christ will rescue it. The Christian Zionist, believing himself to have the key to prophecy, is tempted to wait passively for his imminent redemption, rather than labor diligently to spread the kingdom of God.

Protestant theologian Timothy Weber has an extensive treatment of this issue in his book *On the Road to Armageddon*, to include identifying the various strains within Christian Zionism. Referring to *futurist pre-millennialists* (those who believe the book of Revelation refers to events “at the very end of the present age”), Weber states: “[They] have been most interested in developing elaborate end-times scenarios that contain the following: a crescendo of natural disasters, an increase in persecution of and apostasy among God’s people, the rise of the Antichrist and the accompanying great tribulation, wars and rumors of wars that culminate in the battle of Armageddon, and the dramatic return of Jesus to defeat Satan and establish his millennial kingdom. Such notions are the mainstays of countless preachers, teachers, and televangelists.”^[5]

Edward Irving and Pre-Millennialism

Just as Jewish Zionism would need a “kick-start” by the charismatic Theodore Herzl, so Christian Zionism required a stimulus from a galvanizing personality. The first such influence, in the early nineteenth century, was a minister in the Church of Scotland named Edward Irving. By that time, the notion of “Restorationism” – the advocacy of returning the Jews to their ancient homeland – was two hundred years old, as we have seen in Part One.

However, it remained largely an isolated idea and its adherents were often considered crackpots by mainstream Anglicans. Restorationism was partly a humanitarian gesture (albeit ill-considered) and not linked to a systematic theology which could act as its champion. In the 1820s that began to change, first in England and then in America.

Beginning in 1826, a series of annual conferences on prophecy was held at the Surrey estate of Henry Drummond, a wealthy member of Parliament and religious zealot. Known as the Albury Park Conferences, they were the brainchild of one Lewis Way, whose considerable fortune and earnest activism had brought him to a leading role in the London Jews’ Society.^[6] Attendees were solicited “without distinction of sect or party,” requiring only a belief in “the Jewish and Christian hope.” Then, as today, Christian Zionism belonged to no one denomination, but cut across sectarian lines.^[7] The Albury Park conferences gave Edward Irving – described by a contemporary as “the greatest orator of our times” – an ideal forum to preach his pessimistic gospel of pre-millennialism, which from the outset was intrinsically linked with the restoration of the Jews. Pre-millennialism did not originate with Irving (the Puritan Thomas Brightman, discussed in Part One, had the same view of the end times). However, Irving’s particular views were so full of “doom and gloom” that he found himself virtually alone in espousing them.^[8] Irving believed that *“a fatally corrupted Christendom was hurtling so speedily toward disaster that Jesus must stage his Second Coming sooner rather than later, after the conversion and restoration of the Jews, but well before the dawning of any thousand-year reign of peace and prosperity; perhaps as early as 1867.”*^[9]

The Albury Conferences allowed Irving to convincingly propagate his views among other Restorationists. According to author Victoria Clark, *“Irving’s biographer has characterized the bond forged among the Albury group as that of an elite of code-breakers, of ‘a patriotic band of conspirators furnished with all the information and communications in cipher which cannot be given at length to the common mass.’”*^[10] This cocksure certitude about the future has become a hallmark feature of Christian Zionism through the years, as we will see in contemporary figures such as Hal Lindsey and John Hagee. Then as now, however, the compulsion of Christian Zionists to predict the future could create embarrassment. During the 1827 Albury Conference, for example, news arrived about the death of the Duke of Reichstadt, the son of Napoleon. As the young Napoleon fit into the Albury system as the Beast of the Apocalypse, one participant exclaimed in dismay, “That cannot be true, for it would overturn this whole interpretation.”^[11]

John Nelson Darby and Dispensationalism

Irving and Shaftesbury – each in his own way – gave impetus to Christian Zionism in England. Irving pioneered the eschatology while Shaftesbury cultivated a revolutionary

blend of religion and politics in the realm of foreign policy. But it was the Anglo-Irishman clergyman John Nelson Darby who crafted a complete system of theology and transported it to America. Darby has been called Christian Zionism’s “greatest apostle and missionary, the apostle Paul of the movement” who spread its teachings to every continent.”[12] As a young Anglican clergyman, he became notable for converting numerous Irish Catholic peasants to the Anglican Communion.[13] By the 1830s, however, he had convinced himself that Anglicanism and the Protestant churches in general (to say nothing of Roman Catholicism) were corrupt and apostate. He repeatedly remarked, “The Church is in ruins.”[14] Darby became one of the early movers in the so-called Plymouth Brethren, an evangelical “house church” movement which embraced *sola scriptura*, emphasized a literal interpretation of the Bible, and considered itself transcending denominations, hence its name *brethren*. (Darby’s influence did not prevent the Plymouth Brethren from many subsequent schisms, beginning in 1848).[15] Following in the theological footsteps of Edward Irving, Darby gained fame through his leading role at the Powerscourt Conferences on prophecy (1831-1833). These gatherings, which “focused on a pessimistic interpretation of world events and the imminent return of Christ, confirmed Darby’s own denunciation of the established churches.”[16]

After his break with Anglicanism, Darby began developing and spreading his new gospel far and wide, making no fewer than seven journeys to North America in the 1860s and 1870s. Darby was a charismatic and deeply spiritual man; in some respects, he was a stark contrast to the many modern-day Christian Zionist leaders who covet power bases and crave media publicity. A little-known story about Darby during one of his visits to the United States reflects his charm and compassion. One Sunday afternoon, after worship services, Darby, as was his habit, accepted a dinner invitation from a poor Plymouth Brethren family. “*When Darby and the family sat down to eat, he asked the boy why he was so sad on such a delightful occasion. The lad blurted out that his parents had cooked his pet rabbit. Refusing to eat another bite, Darby excused himself and left the table with the young boy. They walked to a nearby pond. Darby produced several toy ducks from his pocket and entertained his new friend for the entire afternoon. The two returned much later, the little lad beaming with joy.*”[17] Yet Darby’s associates judged him “autocratic, credulous, and gullible.”[18] He viewed virtually everything through the prism of eschatology. For example, he saw the invention of the [telegraph](#) as a sign that the end of the world was approaching, calling it “an invention of Cain and a harbinger of Armageddon.”[19]

Despite his extensive international travels, his prodigious writings (40 volumes), and impressive output of hymns, the world today remembers John Nelson Darby for something entirely different. He is recognized as the originator of *dispensationalism* and its corollary, so-called *pre-tribulation rapture* theology. In fact, Darby borrowed considerably from

Edward Irving in his notions about a failing church and a “future Jewish dispensation,” but was reluctant to acknowledge the influence of others on his own views.[\[20\]](#) Protestant theologians consider Darby’s dispensationalism as a variation of premillennialism. While not all premillennialists buy in to Darby’s dispensationalism, it seems that accepting it goes hand in glove with belief in a “rapture.” According to the Scofield Reference Bible, a dispensation is a distinct period of time in which God tested humanity in relation to a specific revelation of the divine will. “In each era, humankind failed to fulfill the responsibility laid on it by God, which in turn led to the beginning of a new dispensation with new opportunities and eventual human failure.”[\[21\]](#) The exact number of dispensations throughout history was a matter of great debate among Darby’s followers. Most eventually settled on seven, as follows: (1) from paradise to the Great Flood; (2) Noah; (3) Abraham; (4) Israel; (5) Gentiles; (6) the Spirit; (7) the millennium. Most American dispensationalists eventually fell in line with the somewhat different seven-fold system of Cyrus Scofield, as shown on the graphic “God’s Plan of the Ages.” [\[22\]](#)

Darby’s teachings perturbed many, even his fellow Plymouth Brethren. They were not upset by his “literalist” approach to the Bible or his division of salvation history into distinct periods. Rather, they objected to “Darby’s insistence that the Bible contained two stories, not just one. To Darby, the Bible revealed two divine plans operating in history, one for an earthly people, Israel, and the other for a heavenly people, the church.” The development of separate story lines was, in part, Darby’s answer to the text of 2 Timothy 2:15.[\[23\]](#) The *King James* passage is as follows: “*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*” For Darby, “rightly dividing the word of truth” meant distinguishing between Biblical passages for Israel and those for the church. Of note, virtually all other Bible translations refer to *accurately handling* (rather than *rightly dividing*) the word of truth.

It is not the primary purpose of this article to debunk Christian Zionist theology. However, for Catholics, and even for “traditional” Protestants, Darby’s approach defies scripture and causes more problems than it answers. We will briefly cite three New Testament verses as examples. In Romans, where Paul writes extensively about the Jews, he declares (Ro 10:11-12), “*The scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed.’ This includes everyone because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to him.*” A few verses later (Ro 11:12), Paul writes that “*The sin of the Jews brought rich blessings to the world, and their spiritual poverty brought rich blessings to the Gentiles. Then, how much greater the blessings will be when the complete number of Jews is included?*” If the Jews have a distinct destiny in the divine plan, how can Paul refer to them as “included” with the Gentiles? Finally, in Galatians 3:29, Paul writes, “*If you belong to Christ, then you are the descendants of*

Abraham and will receive what God has promised.” Again, if God has entirely separate plans for the Jews and the Gentiles, how can a member of “the church” be a descendant of Abraham? These citations and others reveal that the so-called “literalist” approach of Christian Zionists to scripture is highly selective.

Cooking the Book of Daniel

Like other pre-millennialists, Darby was not content to provide a framework for the past; he had also to extend it into the future. He was fixated on the prophecy embedded in chapters 7-9 of the Book of Daniel which apparently provided a “countdown” to the appearance of the Messiah of the Jews. With his system of dispensationalism, Darby could also apply Daniel to the Gentiles. Daniel’s famous prophecy appears as a timeline of “seven times seventy years.”^[24] The apparent total of 490 years is divided into three parts as follows: (1) seven weeks (49 years) from the Jews’ release of captivity in Babylon until the rebuilding of Jerusalem; (2) another sixty-two weeks (434 years) until the “cutting off” of the Messiah, i.e., Christ; and (3) one final week (7 years) for the time, as Darby saw it, from the appearance of the Antichrist to the final return of Christ. The final week was considered to be the “great tribulation,” in which the Antichrist makes a pact with the Jews, then betrays them and halts their sacrificial offerings. We will later address the events of the “great tribulation.”

Attempting to validate his theory with historical dates, Darby and his followers ran into a problem. As Timothy Weber notes, they *“had a lot riding on this interpretation, so they worked hard to show that Jesus was put to death 483 years (sixty-nine “weeks”) after Artaxerxes’ decision to allow Nehemiah and a small contingent of Jews to return to Israel to work on Jerusalem’s fallen walls (Neh 2:1-8). The problem was that the generally accepted date for Artaxerxes’ decree was 444 B.C. Thus, adding sixty-nine “weeks” (483 years) to 444 B.C. placed the Messiah’s rejection at A.D. 39, too late for the generally accepted date for the crucifixion of Jesus.”*^[25] Undaunted, some of Darby’s American disciples such as James Brookes and Cyrus Scofield created a number of alibis for this prophetic disconnect. Other dispensationalists discovered that, if they used a 360-day year (instead of 365 days), the sixty-ninth week ended on Palm Sunday (“right on schedule,” as Weber wryly observes).^[26] The Babylonians were in fact far too sophisticated to use such a crude calendar.

A second problem was how to explain the obvious fact that Daniel’s seventieth week did not occur after the Messiah was “cut off.” Darby’s answer was imaginative and revolutionary, one that smelled of modifying the prophecy to fit the facts. His solution was a “postponement theory” in which God suspended the prophetic timetable for the Jews after the redemptive action of Christ while He set about establishing a new and “heavenly”

people, the Christian church. As Weber states, “In essence, this meant that the Christian church existed outside the Bible’s prophetic timetable and had no prophecies of its own. It occupied a prophetic time warp, what dispensationalists called a ‘great parenthesis’ of prophetic time.”[\[27\]](#)

The “Rapture”

The final and most distinctive aspect of Darby’s theological system is his notion of the so-called “rapture” and its location on the timeline of his dispensations. To be sure, a “rapture,” or “snatching away” of the faithful at the end of time, has a clear basis in scripture, specifically in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17: *“There will be the shout of command, the archangel’s voice, the sound of God’s trumpet, and the Lord himself will come down from heaven. Those who have died believing in Christ will rise to life first; then we who are living at that time will be gathered up along with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...”* Christians have traditionally understood this event to occur at the end of time. Darby, however, confidently concluded that the “rapture” of the church would occur at the end of his so-called sixth dispensation; with the “church” then in heaven, God can turn His attention to the Jews, His “earthly” people, whose destiny is entirely separate. Darby’s own writings claim that, once he understood the clear distinction between Israel and the “church,” a rapture before the millennium was the obvious answer. *“It is this conviction, that the Church is properly heavenly in its calling and relationship with Christ, forming no part of the course of events of the earth, which makes its rapture so simple and clear; and on the other hand, it shows how the denial of its rapture brings down the Church to an earthly position, and destroys its whole spiritual character and position. Prophecy does not relate to heaven. The Christian’s hope is not a prophetic subject at all.”*[\[28\]](#)

The concept of a *pretribulation rapture* is nowhere documented in Christianity prior to John Nelson Darby. In essence, it means a second *and third* coming of Christ, who will come for His saints at the rapture and *with* His saints, seven years later, after the tribulation which – for the Christian Zionist – marks the last of Daniel’s seventy weeks. Indeed, it is so radical that one is tempted to compare Darby with Martin Luther, of whom the Emperor Charles stated at the Diet of Worms: *“For it is certain that a single monk must err if he stands against the opinion of all Christendom. Otherwise Christendom itself would have erred for more than a thousand years.”*[\[29\]](#) The Catholic Church has prudently not officially elaborated on aspects of the “rapture” or its timing relative to other events. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is silent. However, Catholic apologists have been clear about the errors of Darby’s theology. For example, Colin Donovan offers this comment on Darby’s “rapture:” *Naturally, non-Catholics cannot accept that the Catholic Church represents Christ in this world, so they are forced to look for a personal earthly reign somewhere out in*

the future. The notion that Jesus will come, reign, and then depart, so that the devil can trick the world again, is incompatible with the incomprehensible dignity of the Lord and His love for His people. Jesus’ Coming will be definitive, triumphant and ever-lasting, NOT temporal and limited.”[\[30\]](#)

Certainly one toxic result of “rapture” theology is the tendency of its Christian adherents to withdraw from the world, rather than engage it. How then can Christians aspire to be the “salt of the earth” or the “light of the world?” (Mt 5:13-14). Darby himself counselled a follower with an aptitude for mathematics against such a possible career: “*Such a purpose was very proper, if entertained by a worldly man. Let the dead bury their dead; and let the world study the things of the world...such studies cannot be eagerly followed by the Christian...*”[\[31\]](#) However, Weber notes that, for the faithful, dispensationalism could be a “massive motivator, not a spiritual sedative.”[\[32\]](#) Certainly, with the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, many Christian Zionists evolved from passive observers of world affairs to hyper-active participants through their support of Israel. The introduction of a “rapture” also added a beguiling element of “gloom and glee” into the doctrine of premillennial dispensationalism, which endures to this day. Christian Zionists began to eagerly anticipate the coming catastrophes of the great tribulation, convinced that they will be miraculously transported to a place of divine safety, even as their relatives, friends, and neighbors – and the Jews – begin to endure incredible suffering and misery.



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Darby’s American Disciples

Darby’s gospel of pre-millennial dispensationalism bore fruit in the United States in a way not possible in England with its “official” Anglican Church. In the words of Victoria Clark, the American religious field was *“unregulated, crowded and marvelously varied...a place in which anyone – ordained, or licensed, or not – was free to preach his own version of the Word of God, one in which charismatic men with clearly communicable ideas, — no matter how wildly eccentric or inflammatory – were guaranteed a chance to prosper.”*[\[33\]](#) In this accommodating environment, Darby’s preaching slowly, inexorably took root with the help of American converts to his cause. We will briefly look at four key allies.

James Brookes was a Presbyterian pastor in St. Louis, whose church hosted Darby no fewer than five times. A prominent premillennialist, Brookes was a voluminous author of tracts and books. His most well-known work, *Maranatha*, was a massive tome on eschatology.[\[34\]](#) In it, Brookes observed that all ancient empires which had opposed the Jews – Egypt, Persia, Rome, Assyria, and Babylon – had collapsed. Pastor John Hagee, arguably the most prominent Christian Zionist in America today, has built on Brooke’s list, adding the Russian empire, Nazi Germany, and the British empire as among those suffering divine punishment for inflicting harm on God’s chosen people.[\[35\]](#) Brookes was also the guiding force behind the so-called Niagara Bible Conference, a series of annual meetings at which leading dispensationalists could promulgate their views on prophecy; they lasted from 1876 until Brookes’ death in 1897.

One of Brookes’ many colleagues was the evangelical preacher Dwight L. Moody, born in Massachusetts but who established his home and ministry in Chicago. Considering himself a conscientious objector at the start of the Civil War, he nonetheless volunteered with the U.S. Christian Commission and assisted wounded and dying soldiers at the battlefield.[\[36\]](#) Described as the Billy Graham of the nineteenth century, Moody took his pulpit to the streets, where he *“smashed the whisky jugs of alcoholics, chased potential child converts through the streets, held services in saloon bars, and harangued crowds of passers-by from the steps of the town hall.”*[\[37\]](#) Viewed with some suspicion in his early days, Moody cemented his reputation with a three-year revival tour in England in the 1870s, where his congregations, drawn from all classes, included a daughter-in-law of Queen Victoria.[\[38\]](#) On his return to the states, Moody’s celebrity allowed him to preach his dispensationalism to huge audiences around the country. In one popular stump sermon, “The Lord’s Return,” Moody warned of the impending “rapture,” declaring that “the trump[et] of God may be sounded, for anything we know, before I finish this sermon...”[\[39\]](#)

Moody’s enduring contribution to Christian Zionism has been the Moody Bible Institute, founded in 1886. Proudly calling itself the “West Point of Fundamentalism,” the institute

revolutionized the process of creating ordained ministers associated with the traditional Protestant denominations. As Victoria Clark writes, *“Out went the Hebrew and Greek studies pursued at America’s top theological colleges; in came practical crash courses in spreading the fundamentalist world-view. The institute’s most famous method of teaching the Bible rejected minute analysis of the text and its different authors, as well as examination of its historical context, in favour of ‘synthetic study’, which involved reading each book of the Bible, straight through, at one sitting, over and over again.”*[\[40\]](#) This method, if simplistic and skewed, proved highly effective. Per Timothy Weber, “During a time of mounting crisis over the Bible’s reliability and accessibility to laypeople, dispensationalists were able to ‘out-Bible’ everybody else in sight.”[\[41\]](#) This technique has been thoroughly mastered by today’s Christian Zionist leaders, such as Hal Lindsey, Chuck Missler, and John Hagee. The Moody Bible Institute became the prototype for other Bible institutes (notably the Dallas Theological Seminary), almost all of which taught dispensationalism; by 1956, they were training some ten thousand pastors and missionaries annually around the country.[\[42\]](#) Today the Institute boasts multiple campuses, a budget in excess of \$100 million, and total student enrollment of nearly 4,000. Moody requires its students to personally adhere to eight points of doctrine, including “the physical and imminent return of Christ.”[\[43\]](#)

Another associate of James Brookes was the Missouri politician and lawyer Cyrus Scofield. With an early reputation for drinking, philandering, and swindling, Scofield found himself at one point in a St. Louis jail for forgery. There he was “born again” after reading the works of John Nelson Darby; he became a disciple of Brookes and eventually shared the stage with him at his annual Niagara conferences. Scofield developed an infatuation with the status and potential of the Jews. In his book *Prophecy Made Plain* (1910), he writes, *“The Jew was never more virile, aggressive and capable, nor ever stronger in the affairs of the world than he is today. He is the very forefront of a civilization so relentlessly material that it crushes beneath its chariot wheels everything that is weak.”* Furthermore, after the “rapture” of the church, the Jews would make ideal evangelists: *“The Jew is everywhere now; the Jew knows every language now; the Jew is acclimated in every country now; the Jew knows the habits of every people now, and not only is he the ablest, most sagacious man in the world, but the Jew has the money to do it with.”*[\[44\]](#)

Scofield’s first work was *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (1888) in which, along with his other writings, he borrowed heavily from Darby without acknowledging his source. About this time, Scofield conceived the idea for his enduring contribution to Christian Zionism, the *Scofield Reference Bible*. It became only the second Bible in English to incorporate a running commentary on the Biblical text, rather than using a separate volume; the first was the 1560 Geneva Bible of Theodore Beza, similarly annotated with Calvinist commentary

(see Part One). Steven Sizer notes that “the combination of an attractive format, illustrative notes, and cross references has led both critics and advocates to acknowledge the *Scofield Reference Bible* to have been the most influential book among evangelicals during the first half of the twentieth century.”[\[45\]](#) Several authors have remarked on the arrogance which prompted Scofield’s approach and the confusion which resulted. For example, *“Scofield’s footnotes and his systematized schemes of hermeneutics have been memorized by many as religiously as have verses of the Bible. It is not at all uncommon to hear devout men recite these footnotes prefaced by the words: ‘The Bible says....’ Many a pastor has lost all influence with members of his congregation and has been branded a liberal for no other reason than failure to concur with all the footnotes of Dr. Scofield. Even many ministers use the teachings of Scofield as tests of orthodoxy.”*[\[46\]](#) Scofield further colored his work with his highly selective choice of texts for commentary and his insertion of headings for texts relevant for dispensationalist theology.[\[47\]](#)

A final note is in order about Scofield, whose private life has had little scrutiny. A Midwesterner for most of his life, he was curiously invited in 1901 to become a member of the exclusive New York Lotos Club, apparently through the influence of the wealthy Jewish lawyer Samuel Untermyer, who was also an early and active Zionist. As recently documented, Untermyer’s motivation in sponsoring Scofield was to use him to cultivate evangelical Christian support for the looming opportunity for Jews to gain a legal foothold in the Holy Land.[\[48\]](#) This relationship would be only the first of many over the years between eager premillennial dispensationalists and calculating Jewish Zionists. We will later explore a similar relationship between Jerry Falwell and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Our last notable figure among the first generation of American Christian Zionists is the wealthy Chicago businessman William Blackstone. Unlike the three previous figures who were “ministers” or “pastors,” Blackstone was a layman and entirely self-taught, having never attended a college or seminary. He joined Dwight L. Moody in Chicago’s evangelical Christian community, a network so extensive that the online Jewish Virtual Library has called the city an “incubator of American Zionism.”[\[49\]](#) His 1878 book, *Jesus is Coming*, outsold even Brookes’ *Maranatha* and was the largest-selling Christian Zionist publication until Hal Lindsey’s *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, almost one hundred years later. Translated into over forty languages, it would spread the Christian Zionist gospel widely in Europe and elsewhere. In *Jesus is Coming*, Blackstone clearly stated his view on the entitlement of Jews to return to their ancient homeland. *“The title deed to Palestine is recorded, not in the Mohammedan Seraglio of Jerusalem nor the Seraglio of Constantinople, but in hundreds of millions of Bibles now extant in more than three hundred languages of the earth.”*[\[50\]](#)

Unlike his colleagues, Blackstone’s advocacy for the Jews extended even to the political

sphere (he was the first of many to do so). The catalyst was the wave of anti-Jewish pogroms in Russia in the early 1880s. Seeing the Russian state-sponsored terror as an opportunity, he eventually circulated a petition – the so-called Blackstone Memorial – to President Benjamin Harrison asking that the Russian Jews be sent to Palestine. *“Why not give Palestine back to them again? According to God’s distribution of nations it is their home, an inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force.”*^[51] The Blackstone Memorial of 1891 was most notable for the prominence of its 400-plus signatories, including the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, a New York senator, the Speaker of the House (Thomas Reed), John D. Rockefeller, J. P. Morgan, future president William McKinley, and numerous city mayors and newspaper editors.^[52] However, Harrison did not consider himself a modern-day Cyrus who would return the Jews to their promised land. In any event, he had no legal authority to do so (nor did the Balfour Declaration of 1917). Although the Blackstone Memorial quickly gathered dust in the files of the Harrison Administration, it set a precedent. In 1948, more than half a century later, President Truman bowed under the pressure of similar requests (in the heat of his re-election campaign) and recognized the new state of Israel, just eleven minutes after it proclaimed its independence.^[53]

Blackstone cultivated many American Jewish friends in his efforts over the years, including Associate Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. Timothy Weber notes that, *“...Blackstone kept his Jewish friends well supplied with dispensational literature, including some material that he suggested ought to be hidden away until after the rapture of the church so that those left behind could understand what had happened and turn to Jesus.”*^[54] However, his advocacy of a return to Palestine received a cold reception among Chicago’s Reformed Jewish community which staunchly favored assimilation into American society. Said prominent Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, *“We say ‘the country wherein we live is our Palestine, and the city wherein we dwell [Chicago] is our Jerusalem.’”*^[55] Indeed, Zionism received the support of only a small percentage of America’s Jews until World War II and the Holocaust. As for Blackstone, by 1917 he was caught up, as were all dispensationalists, in the thrill of the Balfour Declaration and expected to be “raptured” at any moment. He persuaded his Zionist friend Brandeis to be the executor of his estate (as a Jew, Brandeis could not be raptured).^[56] For his part, Brandeis called Blackstone “the father of Zionism, as your work antedates Herzl.”^[57]

Picture: Edward Irving and John Nelson Darby

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Pope Leo's New Hermeneutic of Continuity

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"He said to him the third time: Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" (John 21:17)

Habemus Papam Pope Leo XIV

By Murray Rundus

On May 8, 2025, around 6 p.m. in Rome, crowds began gradually leaving St. Peter's Square. We had been expecting white smoke from the Sistine Chapel, if there was to be any, around 30 minutes earlier, as that is when the Vatican Press Office had told us was the latest approximate time for smoke to appear. It would seem that the Conclave was to move into a fifth round of voting, the same number of votes that it took for Pope Francis to be elected. After filming a short video explaining the number of votes it took, and how this could mean we would see a long conclave that everyone was anticipating, there was a roar from the crowd. As I looked behind me, there was white smoke; a new Pope had been elected. Later in the day than anticipated, but after only four rounds of voting, the number it took to swiftly elect Pope Benedict XVI, the Cardinals managed to elect Pope Leo XIV. There was an initial optimism in the air as it was announced that Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost would be Pope. Some saw him as a complete unknown, but we had reported just that week that he was a likely top-three contender. The Pope came out onto the loggia in the red mozzetta, a tradition neglected by Pope Francis, and immediately he proclaimed the words of the Risen Christ, emphasizing the true and historical nature of the Resurrection but also imploring the crowd to take up a more fervent dedication

to Our Lady, all accompanied by his blessing and a plenary indulgence.

What worried me then, and what still worries me, is that the traditional media would fall into what I called at the time a "vibes-based analysis," one based more on emotion than reality itself. This reality showed that the result of this conclave proved that this kind of emotional or instinctual analysis was extremely faulty. Already moving into the Conclave, there were many who were saying they predicted Cardinal Parolin would become Pope because of a feeling of impending doom. Many respectable journalists in Rome only had that much to offer! Those who had been studying the Conclave, in this period of history where we know practically everything about each of the Cardinal electors, knew that Parolin had fallen into disfavor due to the scandals of the China deal, property agreements, and general discontent with his job as Secretary of State. We also knew that the College was relatively more conservative than was being reported, with many of the Cardinals selected by Pope Francis being selected for their identity as being located on the peripheries rather than for their ideological position.¹ This, combined with a number of reports from those who knew the Cardinals well, allowed Vatican analysts, including those of us at *Catholic Family News*, to accurately assess that Cardinal Prevost was indeed a likely contender.



*Leone PP. XIV
8 maggio 2025*

Reading Pope Leo XIV

I believe it to be very important, especially for lay people involved in the traditional movement, to be precise in their reading of the Pontificate of Pope Leo XIV, to avoid emotional responses, and most importantly, to insist on judging our times by clear principles applied with prudence.

The election of Pope Leo XIV has drawn a mix of cautious optimism and vehement criticism from the traditionalist world. While to me it seems the consensus is developing towards optimism, the confusion is somewhat understandable. How is one to react when the predecessor of Pope Leo destroyed many communities and actively

concerned himself with disrupting the spiritual lives of so many? There is also a more practical and principled problem as there is now a mix of perspectives under the umbrella term "traditionalist" of those who recognized Pope Francis as a valid Pope and those who did not in various forms, whether saying Benedict

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- [1] Barbara Tuchman, *Bible and Sword* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1956), p. 207.
- [2] <http://www.religionnews.com/2015/12/10/vatican-catholic-jews-jewish-anti-semitism/>. Also see *Catholic Family News*, Vol. 23, Issue 1 (January 2016).
- [3] See *Catholic Family News*, Vol. 22, Issues 2-4 (February-April 2015).
- [4] <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/the-rapture>; see also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Premillennialism>
- [5] Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 10.
- [6] The Earl of Shaftesbury was president of the society from 1838 until his death in 1885.
- [7] Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon* (London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 58.
- [8] Stephen Sizer, *Christian Zionism* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), p. 44. Sizer’s thesis which led to the book is available online at http://sttpml.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Christian_Zionism_PhD_Thesis.pdf
- [9] Clark, op. cit., p. 59.
- [10] Clark, op. cit., p. 60.
- [11] Sizer, op. cit., p. 47. In the event, the Duke of Reichstadt did not die until 1832.
- [12] Donald E. Wagner, *Anxious for Armageddon* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), p. 89.
- [13] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nelson_Darby
- [14] As cited in Sizer, op. cit., p. 50.
- [15] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth_Brethren
- [16] Sizer, op. cit., p. 51.
- [17] Wagner, op. cit.
- [18] Clark, op. cit., p. 63.

[19] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Nelson_Darby

[20] Sizer, op. cit., p. 51.

[21] As cited in Weber, op. cit., p. 20.

[22] Ibid. Separately, Steven Sizer (p. 112) argues that Darby did not necessarily propose a fixed number of dispensations and that Cyrus Scofield was responsible for the seven dispensations now generally accepted.

[23] Ibid., p. 20-21.

[24] See Daniel 9:24-27. In Hebrew, the word for “week” is more properly a “group of seven” which could refer to seven days or seven years.

[25] Weber, op. cit., p.22.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 23.

[28] As cited in Weber, op. cit., p. 25.

[29] As cited in Warren H. Carroll, *The Cleaving of Christendom* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 2000), p. 50.

[30] <https://www.ewtn.com/expert/answers/endtimes.htm>. See also Carl Olson at <http://www.catholicity.com/commentary/olson/08205.html>. Of note, as recorded in the writings of the Venerable Maria Agreda, the Blessed Virgin revealed that the twelve-year old Christ child disclosed to the Jewish rabbis in the Temple that the 70 weeks of Daniel “must certainly be now complete.” (*The City of God*, Volume 3, Chapter V, No. 54).

[31] Sizer, op. cit., p. 53.

[32] Weber, op. cit., p. 66.

[33] Clark, op. cit., pp. 83-84.

[34] The 1889 edition of *Maranatha* is available to read online at <https://archive.org/details/J.H.BrookesMaranathaOrTheLordCometh1889>

[35] Clark, op. cit., p. 86.

[36] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dwight_L._Moody

[37] Clark, op. cit., p. 88.

[38] Ibid. Princess Alexandra, eventually Queen Consort as wife of Edward VII.

[39] Weber, op. cit., p. 48.

[40] Clark, op. cit., p. 89.

[41] Weber, op., cit., p. 26.

[42] Ibid., p. 35 and Sizer, op. cit., p. 70.

[43] <http://www.moody.edu/doctrinal-qualifications/>

[44] Clark, op. cit., p. 91.

[45] Sizer, op. cit., p. 75.

[46] As cited in Sizer, p. 76. (William E. Cox, *Examination of Dispensationalism*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), pp. 55-56.

[47] Sizer, p. 118.

[48] <http://www.wrmea.org/2015-october/the-scofield-bible%E2%80%94the-book-that-made-zionists-of-americas-evangelical-christians.html>. Also see http://www.eaec.org/bookstore/books/joseph_canfield_biography.htm

[49] <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/chicago.html>

[50] Clark, op. cit., p. 93. See also Sizer, op. cit., p. 71.

[51] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackstone_Memorial

[52] Weber, op. cit., p. 104.

[53] See for example <https://tsup.truman.edu/item.asp?itemId=327>

[54] Weber, p. 105.

[55] Clark, op. cit., p. 95.

[56] Ibid, p. 93.

[57] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_E._Blackstone