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“In No Country are the Prophecies of the Bible more Revered than in Scotland”

The Church of Scotland, Christian Zionists, and The Edinburgh Chovevei Zion

Mark Gilfillan

I N HIS RECENT *Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland*, Donald Lewis stated that Scottish Presbyterian involvement was “highly significant” in the founding of English societies geared towards the conversion of Jews, and that Calvinists from Scotland and Ireland had been instrumental in the establishment of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews.¹ Similarly, Nancy Stevenson has pointed out that in almost all nineteenth-century missionary efforts in Britain, Scots featured prominently as pioneer preachers, as planners, and polemicists.² However, other than these brief allusions by Lewis and Stevenson to the significant role played by Scots in directing Jewish evangelism, surprisingly little research has been devoted to assessing the context of this involvement, or the evolution of Scottish Calvinist attitudes towards Jews, Palestine, or Zionism. This has mainly been the result of the neglect of Scotland’s ecclesiastical history more generally. Emma Macleod has argued that, “for a country whose church was known for being socially influential, Scotland’s ecclesiastical history remains a rich, and yet relatively under-researched field.”³ This chapter will attempt to relate the roots of the Scottish enthusiasm for Jews and Judaism, and to explore the complex manner in which this enthusiasm manifested itself, particularly in relation to early Zionism in Scotland. Existing works on Scottish

¹ Donald M. Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 58.

² Quoted in Lewis, *Origins of Christian Zionism*, 59.

³ Emma V. Macleod, “A Unique and Glorious Mission: Women and Presbyterianism in Scotland, 1830–1930 (review),” *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2003): 749–51.

Jewry have focused overwhelmingly on the experiences of Jewish immigrants in Scotland. These works often note that Scotland's Calvinist churches were particularly keen to convert Jews, but fail to probe deeper into Scottish motivations or attitudes, or to discover other ways in which this interest in Jews and Judaism manifested itself.⁴

Works on Scottish missions to Jews outside Scotland have similarly tended to avoid discussion of other ways in which the interest of the Scottish Churches in Jews and Judaism was expressed, focusing instead on the methods employed by missionaries, and their presumed role in an imperialist tradition.⁵ No research has previously been carried out into the involvement of leading Scottish Presbyterians in Jewish Zionist groups in Scotland, or the keen interest taken by Scottish ministers in the activities of Zionist settlers in Palestine. Nor has any work been carried out into the excursions to the Holy Land undertaken by Scottish ministers purely for the purpose of observing and reporting on the Zionist project. Indeed, the lack of scholarly work on the attitudes of the Christian churches more generally towards Zionism before 1948, and how these attitudes evolved over time, arguably represents a significant lacuna in existing historiography.⁶ This neglect is particularly remarkable given the extensive interplay between religion and politics in this area of study. Most importantly for this study, it worth recalling that six of the ten members of the cabinet behind the Balfour Declaration had a Calvinist upbringing on the "Celtic Fringe" of Britain, and that Balfour himself "was raised in a strongly evangelical Scottish Presbyterian home, and was nurtured in a Calvinistic evangelism."⁷

⁴ See for example, Abraham Levy, "The Origins of Scottish Jewry," *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 20 (1959–61): 129–62; Kenneth E. Collins, *Go and Learn: The International Story of Jews and Medicine in Scotland* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1988); *Second City Jewry: The Jews of Glasgow in the Age of Expansion, 1790–1919* (Glasgow: Scottish Jewish Archives Committee, 1990); *Be Well! Jewish Immigrant Health and Welfare in Glasgow, 1860–1914* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2001); ed., *Aspects of Scottish Jewry* (Glasgow: Glasgow Jewish Representative Council, 1987); Charlotte Hutt and Harvey L. Kaplan, eds, *A Scottish Shtetl: Jewish Life in the Gorbals, 1880–1974* (Glasgow: Gorbals Fair Society, 1984); Elizabeth E. Imber, "Saving Jews: The History of Jewish-Christian Relations in Scotland, 1880–1948," Master's Thesis, Brandeis University, 2010; Ben Braber, *Jews in Glasgow, 1879–1939: Immigration and Integration* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007).

⁵ See, for example, Michael Marten, *Attempting to Bring the Gospel Home: Scottish Missions to Palestine, 1839–1917* (International Library of Colonial History 3; London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006); "Imperialism and Evangelisation: Scottish Missionary Methods in Late 19th and Early 20th Century Palestine," *HLS* 5, no. 2 (2006): 155–86.

⁶ For an in-depth look at Christian attitudes since that date see Paul C. Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). Some effort has been made to examine Catholic institutional responses to Zionism before 1948. See for example, Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism: Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895–1925*, trans. Arnold Schwarz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Livia Rokach, *The Catholic Church and the Question of Palestine* (London: Saqi Books, 1987).

⁷ Lewis, *Origins of Christian Zionism*, 3.

Scottish Calvinist Attitudes Towards Jews and Palestine to 1890

Although the Church of Scotland arrived comparatively late to missionary activity directed towards Jews, the missions of the nineteenth century were rooted in the fact that “a concern for the Jewish people was present in Scotland right from the time of the Reformation.”⁸ Arthur Williamson argues that as Scottish apocalyptic expectations deepened during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “interest in the Jews, their culture and their prophesied role in the historical redemption at the end of days, also became articulate and urgent.”⁹

Pioneering historian of British Jewry Cecil Roth noted that though in the seventeenth century there were no more than a few Jews residing in Scotland, “there was at times a fairly strong philosemitic atmosphere. At the time of the Messianic agitation associated with the name of Sabbatai Zevi, Aberdeen seems to have been a principal centre for the dissemination of extravagant reports relating to the mystical movement for the restoration to Palestine.”¹⁰ The most notable of these reports was a pamphlet titled the “New Letter from Aberdeen,” dated October 26, 1665, in which it was claimed a mysterious ship, with white satin sails and white silk ropes was said to have been forced by bad weather to dock at Aberdeen. The pamphlet asserts that with the assistance of a local “Professor of the Tongues and Languages” it was discovered that the inhabitants spoke “broken Hebrew” and that a scarlet inscription on the sails was Hebrew for “These are of the Ten Tribes of Israel.” It was further claimed that the occupants of the ship were on a quest to gather “their Brethren,” and “joyn with them.”¹¹ Enthusiasm for the return of the Jews to their homeland was keenly felt in Aberdeen’s ecclesiastical circles. Patrick Forbes, Episcopalian Bishop of Aberdeen (1618–35), was renowned for his scholarly interest in apocalyptic commentaries, and, according to contemporaries, “visibly ached for the restoration of the Jews to Palestine.”¹²

In the late eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries, as the result of an evangelical impulse provoked by the Wesleyan and Whitefieldite revivals, several pan-evangelical

⁸ Allan Harman, ed., *Mission of Discovery: The Beginning of Modern Jewish Evangelism* (Guernsey: Christian Focus, 1996), 5. The official commencement of the Church of Scotland’s mission to the Jews began in the late 1830s. By contrast, the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews had been founded, not without the involvement of individual Scottish Presbyterians, in 1809. See R. H. Martin, “United Conversionist Activities among the Jews in Great Britain 1795–1815: Pan-Evangelicalism and the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews,” *Church History* 46, no. 4 (1977), 437.

⁹ Arthur H. Williamson, “‘A Pil for Pork-Eaters’: Ethnic Identity, Apocalyptic Promises and the Strange Creation of the Judeo-Scots.” In *The Expulsion of the Jews: 1492 and After*, ed. Raymond B. Waddington and Arthur H. Williamson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 238.

¹⁰ Cecil Roth, “The First Jews in the Land,” *Jewish Chronicle* (May 6, 1938), 32.

¹¹ R. R. London, *A New Letter from Aberdeen in Scotland Sent to a Person of Quality: Wherein is a more full Account of the Proceedings of the Jewes than hath been hitherto Published* (London: Printed by A. Maxwell, 1665). See also, Michael McKeon, “Sabbatai Sevi in England,” *Association for Jewish Studies Review* 3 (1977): 131–69.

¹² Williamson, “Pil for Pork-Eaters,” 238.

institutions emerged in Britain.¹³ The most prominent of these was the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, known as the London Society, founded in 1809 by members of several Protestant denominations including Calvinists from Scotland.¹⁴

Against the backdrop of the French Revolution, an intensification of antisemitic repression in Central Europe, and a resulting increase in Jewish migration to Britain, predictions were made that the “fall of the Papal anti-Christ in Europe” was imminent, and that Jews would soon “be brought within the Christian fold.” Subsequently, argues R. H. Martin, “the Jewish place in evangelical missionary thought took on an urgent proportion almost overnight.”¹⁵ Mel Scult notes that one of the London Society’s key means of conveying its message was the lecture tour, and that during 1813 alone, members of the London Society delivered lectures to seventy-seven Scottish communities.¹⁶ Further, Allan Harman argues that

desire for the conversion of the Jews was maintained in Scotland by evangelical ministers down into the nineteenth century. However, the concern for Israel seems to have been heightened by the arrival in Scotland of quite a number of Jewish people in the early part of that century.¹⁷

There was an inherent weakness in the make-up of the London Society. The “interdenominational balance” which had enabled an early pan-Protestant alliance in the cause of converting Jews quickly began to deteriorate in the face of significant “theological and denominational stumbling blocks.”¹⁸ Not least among these was the question of, once a Jew had been persuaded to convert, under whose auspices should he be baptized? The ensuing schism led to the gradual departure of the lesser denominations. R. H. Martin states that, by 1815, the London Society had been “taken over by Anglicans.”¹⁹

Between 1815 and 1838 an already extant Scottish interest in Jews and Judaism began to take on a momentum of its own, and in early 1838, as a preliminary to the establishment of a mission to the Jews, the Church of Scotland appointed its own committee “to collect information respecting the Jews, their numbers, condition and character.”²⁰ Simultaneously, the Church of Scotland’s leading ministers began to refine

¹³ Martin, “United Conversionist Activities,” 438. For an in-depth analysis of these revivals and their impact on Scotland, see Ian H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 107–28.

¹⁴ Ibid; see also Lewis, *Origins of Christian Zionism*, 58.

¹⁵ Martin, “United Conversionist Activities,” 438, 441. See also Mayir Vreté, “The Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought 1790–1840,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 8, no. 1 (1972): 3–50.

¹⁶ Mel Scult, *Millennial Expectations and Jewish Liberties: A Study of the Efforts to Convert the Jews in Britain, up to the Mid Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 99.

¹⁷ Harman, *Mission of Discovery*, 5.

¹⁸ Martin, “United Conversionist Activities,” 445–46.

¹⁹ Ibid, 437.

²⁰ Church of Scotland, *Course of Lectures on the Jews by The Ministers of the Established Church in Glasgow* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication 1840), 6.

their own approach to Judaism, their interpretation of the Jewish past, and their expectations for the Jewish future. In 1838, during the course of a remarkably clear series of lectures, subsequently published and read in “daughter churches” as far afield as the United States, these ministers articulated the new consensus.²¹

The Church of Scotland entered into an endeavour to convert the world’s Jews in late 1838, asserting in the publication of its lectures that, in relation to “God’s ancient people,” this represented the first act “in which any Christian Church *as a church* [original italics] has expressed her deep interest in and her earnest resolution to promote their salvation.”²² Crucially, unlike Anglican evangelism, in which the move to convert Jews was part of a broader mission to global “heathenism,” the Church of Scotland would focus its effort solely on Jews, and “saw the conversion of others as an incidental bonus.”²³ This exclusive focus on Jews derived from a literal interpretation of Paul’s biblical injunction that salvation should come “to the Jew first.”²⁴

While much of the publication is devoted to justifying a mission to Jews, there is also substantial discussion of Palestine, and the expected “restoration of the Jews.” Rev. Robert Buchanan (ca. 1802–75), during his lecture on “History of the Jews viewed in Connection with Prophecy from the Destruction of Jerusalem to the Present Time,” remarked that “at this day, the Jews still exist to the number... of three millions of souls—a number amply sufficient to people at once their ancient land.”²⁵

In the penultimate lecture of the series, devoted exclusively to a discussion of “The Future Prospects of the Jews—Restoration to their own Land,” Rev. Patrick Fairbairn (1805–74) argued that restoration to Palestine is “the most interesting and important subject of inquiry connected with the present series of lectures.”²⁶ Fairbairn argued that as Jewish converts to Christianity “are now to be seen in almost every city of Christendom,” the time was close at hand when “the Jewish people shall be restored to their ancient territory.”²⁷ Palestine, it was argued, was “a land which may emphatically be called Desolate: being stripped of its ancient and proper people.”²⁸ Fairbairn also showed an

²¹ The significant influence of the Church of Scotland on “daughter churches” and other branches of Presbyterianism should not be understated. Just four years after the establishment of the Church of Scotland Mission to the Jews, the General Assembly of the Irish Presbyterian Church established its own mission to the Jews. For more on this see Nicholas M. Railton, “The Dreamy Mazes of Millenarianism: William Graham and the Irish Presbyterian Mission to German Jews,” in *Protestant Millenialism, Evangelicalism and Irish Society, 1790–2005*, ed. Crawford Gribben and Andrew R. Holmes (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 174–96.

²² Ibid, 7.

²³ Michael Marten, “Anglican and Presbyterian Presence and Theology in the Holy Land,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 5, no. 2 (2005), 183.

²⁴ Church of Scotland, *Course of Lectures on the Jews*, 13. Stevenson Macgill, Professor of Theology at the University of Glasgow, and author of the introductory lecture states: “To the Jew first. The expression is singular, and demands our attention.”

²⁵ Church of Scotland, *Course of Lectures on the Jews*, 18.

²⁶ Ibid, 405.

²⁷ Ibid, 415.

²⁸ Ibid.

awareness of early Jewish Zionism, noting that while there was some scepticism regarding the restoration among “many Christians and Christian divines,” there remained interest in a restoration among “the seed of Israel themselves.”²⁹

How, then, did the Church of Scotland view its role in relation to the expected restoration? It was first asserted that the restoration “shall be begun by the Jews themselves.”³⁰ Interpretations of biblical prophecy suggested that the Church should expect the restoration to be “opposed by the united councils and collective strength of many nations,” that God would subsequently intervene to restore the Jews, but that the restoration would be preceded by a conflict and affliction “such has never been experienced on the earth.”³¹ Thus, as the return to Palestine was to be begun by Jews themselves, the Church of Scotland was not to intervene until that stage. In addition, as God would “surely punish those who combine to prevent the restoration of his ancient people,” it was asserted that it was the duty of the Church of Scotland to work at that time to aid the Jews and “prepare the way for their return.”³²

Christian Zionists and the Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*

Between 1838 and the last decade of the nineteenth century, a number of Scottish missions were sent to the Jews of various European nations, as well as Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey.³³ However, it was only with the arrival of thousands of destitute Jewish migrants in Scotland, fleeing Russian pogroms or seeking new opportunities, at the end of the century, that Scottish Calvinists were provided with an opportunity to evangelize within their own locality. The resources they employed, and the zeal with which they attempted to convert Jewish migrants resulted in Scotland, and in particular Edinburgh, playing host to some of the most remarkable and controversial missionary endeavours in Britain.³⁴ In addition, the foreign and domestic efforts of the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland often intermingled—the Edinburgh Mission, which ran English language classes and a medical dispensary for Jewish immigrants, was operated by a number of Palestinian Jews who had been converted in their homeland by Scottish missionaries.³⁵

By 1890, Edinburgh’s Jewish population had increased from a handful of families in the middle of the nineteenth century to approximately two thousand individuals, most of whom had started life in the Russian Empire. In August 1890, this immigrant

²⁹ Ibid, 429.

³⁰ Ibid, 430.

³¹ Ibid, 431.

³² Ibid.

³³ Harman, *Mission of Discovery*, 5.

³⁴ See for example the career of Sir Leon Levison, a Jewish-born missionary converted in Palestine by a Church of Scotland minister: Frederick Levison, *Christian and Jew: The Life of Leon Levison 1881–1936* (Edinburgh: Pentland, 1989).

³⁵ Ibid. See also the papers of the Edinburgh Jewish Medical Mission, National Archives of Scotland, reference no. CH3/979.

community founded Scotland's first Zionist group—the Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*, or “Lovers of Zion.” *Chovevei Zion* had its roots in the East and had in large part been exported to the West along with the flow of Russian refugees. Western Jewry, having benefitted from decades or even centuries of emancipation, had gradually minimized the position of Zion in Jewish identity. In some cases, it was “even being exorcized by reformers and secularists.”³⁶ By contrast, Russian Jewry, labouring under the oppressive laws of the Tsars, remained more attached to the memory of the Holy Land. For many, “the recollection of its loss was a visceral wound.”³⁷ This cultural memory was imbued with more importance following renewed oppression in Russia. Modern Zionism was subsequently born from this renewed persecution, along with the persistence of antisemitism elsewhere in Europe. The resulting need for security, and the trend toward nationalism which swept Europe towards the end of the nineteenth century, also played major roles in the founding of early Zionist organizations.

The first branches of *Chovevei Zion* were scattered among the towns and cities of the Russian Pale, founded upon the belief that “there is no salvation for the People of Israel until they establish a government of their own in the land of Israel.”³⁸ How exactly this was to be achieved was something never clarified by the movement, though it tended towards the raising of funds for small farm colonies, such as Rehivot and Chadera, and support of the Jewish farmers and artisans who inhabited them.³⁹ In 1884, a conference of Russian branches of the movement had reached a consensus “on the financing of Jewish settlement in Palestine as their first priority,” and by the end of the decade the organization had been established in Britain under the direction of leading Sephardic Jews, Colonel Albert Goldsmid and Eli d’Avigdor.⁴⁰

Support for Edinburgh’s new Zionist society was soon forthcoming from a number of high-profile Christians, and it became quickly apparent that their motivations were heavily influenced by Christian theology. In December 1891, possibly feeling that the first Jewish moves towards the restoration had begun, Rev. William Paterson (1860–1939), Chair of Divinity at Edinburgh University and future Moderator of the Church of Scotland, wrote to the *Jewish Chronicle* to express his support for Zionism. At that time Paterson was also heavily involved in the aid of Jewish refugees and immigrants, having founded the Russian Refugees Relief Society in July. During the course of his letter to the *Jewish Chronicle*, Paterson argued that after the relief of refugees,

the next thing which occupies the attention of many in Scotland is to

³⁶ Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 5.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sachar, *History of Israel*, 16.

³⁹ Yossi Katz states that the *Chovevei Zion* “preached the goals of immigration to Palestine for the sake of agricultural settlement; the reinforcement of national consciousness, and the revival of the Hebrew language.” See Yossi Katz, “Agricultural Settlements in Palestine, 1882–1914,” *Jewish Social Studies* 50, no. 1/2 (1988–1992), 64.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

help Israel to occupy the land of their fathers.... In no country are the prophecies of the Bible more revered than in Scotland.... The colonisation of Palestine, which may be a problem of the future, must be accomplished wisely and systematically.⁴¹

Shortly thereafter, Paterson contacted the leaders of the Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*, assuring them of Christian support and offering to engage the Scottish masses with the Zionist cause. In response, Edinburgh's Zionists seem to have been quite open in accepting support from non-Jewish sources. In fact, Marcus Levy, a picture-frame manufacturer in the city, and at that time Honorary Secretary of the Edinburgh "Tent," wrote to the London-based "Chief Commander" Joseph Prag in July 1891, stating that Rev. Paterson "wishes to establish an honorary *Chovevei Zion* Society in Scotland, entirely submissive under your rules and management he hopes to get hundreds or perhaps thousands of members."⁴² Paterson's ambitions were again outlined in a letter he wrote personally to Dr. Solomon Hirsch, Secretary of the London headquarters, in August 1891. Paterson, possibly referring to his influence in the Church of Scotland, professed to have "special means of telling all Scotland about your work, and I desire to do so soon, for the Scottish nation is interested in the Jews." Paterson seems to have thought of himself as the leader of "Gentile Zionism" in Scotland, and also seems to have presumed a great deal about the willingness of Scots to support the cause. These assumptions are apparent at the conclusion of his letter, where he implores Hirsch "if you have any other idea of any way in which the Scottish people can help you, will you please let me know soon, on how we could in any way advance your interests."⁴³

Paterson's theological motivations for supporting Zionism do not appear to have caused any friction, at least not in Edinburgh. Paterson was well-received among the city's Jewish leaders, and his efforts to aid Jews on several fronts were appreciated by the community as a whole. Marcus Levy wrote to Hirsch in August 1891, praising Paterson's "high position in life and his warm heart towards our Jewish people." He added that he wished "to have many more such friends as he is."⁴⁴

However, Paterson's motivations, as well as his ambitions, were treated with some scepticism by *Chovevei Zion*'s London headquarters, and this scepticism was communicated to representatives in Edinburgh some months later. On the morning of December 30, 1891, Paterson summoned the leaders of the Edinburgh Tent, where "with tears in his eyes," he conveyed the "letter of discouragement" which he had received from Dr. Hirsch. It is unclear from surviving correspondence if Hirsch expressed disagreement

⁴¹ William Paterson, letter to the editor, *Jewish Chronicle* (Dec 18, 1891), 6.

⁴² Scottish Jewish Archive Centre (hereafter SJAC), Marcus Levy to Joseph Prag, July 26, 1891, copy of papers of Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*. Originals held at Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file: A2/44.

⁴³ SJAC, William Paterson to Solomon Hirsch, Aug 26, 1891, copy of papers of Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*. Originals held at Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file: A2/44.

⁴⁴ SJAC, Marcus Levy to Solomon Hirsch, Aug 20, 1891, copy of papers of Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*. Originals held at Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file: A2/44.

with the motivations of those behind the drive to recruit an honorary Gentile branch of the organisation, or whether he simply expressed his doubt regarding its chances for success. What is clear is that the letter conveyed the reluctance of Hirsch to send London “promoters” to the first meeting of this Honorary Edinburgh Tent, which was scheduled to take place on January 11, 1892.

Despite a lack of support from national headquarters, plans for the establishment of a Christian branch of *Chovevei Zion* did go ahead, and during a meeting at *Chovevei Zion* headquarters in London in January 1892, it was remarked by the leader of the assembly that a “zealous friend” in Edinburgh had “enlisted the sympathy of the Lord Provost, the Dukes of Abercorn and Argyll, and several other influential gentlemen in Scotland, and a great demonstration will be held in the Scotch capital on 11 January.” It was added by the speaker that “it was hoped that some good work will follow, and England will imitate the example of Scotland.”⁴⁵ Given the influence and public standing required to lobby such figures, it is highly likely that the zealous friend was in fact Paterson.

The aforementioned “great demonstration” was held in Edinburgh’s General Assembly Hall of the Free Church of Scotland. Of the several hundred in attendance, the majority were Jews, though most of the speakers were Christian. Attempts were made by the majority of Christian speakers to set aside their missionary zeal, in order to foster closer links with local Jews and better support the Zionist cause. When one of the Christian speakers “appeared desirous to utilize the movement for proselytizing purposes; the attempt was promptly checked.”⁴⁶ Rev. Dr. James MacGregor, of St. Cuthbert’s Church, Edinburgh, and a past Moderator of the Church of Scotland, introduced a motion intended to embrace large numbers of non-Jews in the Zionist cause. It was seconded by Paterson. The wording of the motion is worth stating in full:

That a Scottish auxiliary be established, embracing Christians of all denominations, entitled “The Scottish Society for the Restoration of Jews in Palestine.” That the objects of the society will be to aid the *Chovevei Zion* Association in their work in every way in its power, morally, financially, and politically; and to help deserving Jews to obtain land in Palestine for colonisation by loans of money on easy terms.⁴⁷

During the meeting, Paterson revealed himself to be a pragmatist, and open to a number of methods to induce the Scottish public to lend their support to Zionism. Britain as a whole, at the turn of the century, was undergoing a reaction against the scale of Jewish immigration, and the “foreignness” of the new Jewish population. There were increasing calls to restrict Jewish immigration with legislation and even to deport thousands of Jewish immigrants.⁴⁸ In 1892, Paterson, possibly believing xenophobia to be

⁴⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, Jan 8, 1892, 8.

⁴⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, Jan 15, 1892, 16.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ For more on this issue see Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1972).

more likely than piety to achieve his desired result, argued that helping Jews relocate to Palestine would ease the immigrant burden, “since many hundreds of the refugees had been denied entrance into New York, and many of them were returning to this country.”⁴⁹ Thus, while Christian Zionist motivations for the support of Zionism in Edinburgh tended to be theologically rooted, how Zionism was proffered to the non-Jewish public was significantly more nuanced. The meeting concluded with a talk by two deputies from Edinburgh’s *Chovevei Zion*, during which the deputies expounded upon the “prospects before Jews who might settle in Palestine under its auspices.”⁵⁰

Despite the enthusiasm which accompanied its birth, the Scottish Society for the Restoration of Jews in Palestine was an unmitigated failure. Neither the religious zeal of its leaders nor Paterson’s pandering to xenophobia proved sufficient to gather in significant levels of public support for Zionism. A series of letters from Paterson to Hirsch during the course of the following year conveyed Paterson’s growing dismay at the failure of the Honorary Tent, and his realization that the vast majority of Scots were not as interested or as sympathetic as he had believed them to be. In April 1892 he wrote that, “I cannot say we have achieved very much in getting subscriptions.” By January 1893 he seems to have conceded that his efforts were in vain. He wrote to Hirsch:

I cannot report much progress here in interesting Scotch Christians in the scheme of colonization. There is first the general apathy to overcome and the difficulty of starting a new project. Over and above there is a very decided hostility to the scheme in some quarters of the “secular” press. Some even of our religious papers have shown great suspicion if not antagonism.... I fondly hoped that our Scotch auxiliary would by this time be able to send you some hundreds of pounds; but I am sorry our revenue has not been much and we have only a very few to remit. Our membership never swelled as I expected it would.⁵¹

The Honorary Tent was formally dissolved in April 1893, with Paterson remarking on the “surprising” level of apathy shown by Scots towards the scheme of colonization.⁵²

The dissolution of the Honorary Tent did not mark the end of Christian involvement in Edinburgh’s Zionist movement. A letter from a Benjamin Freeman to the *Jewish Chronicle* in August 1893 reveals that by that date Paterson had become Honorary Secretary to the tent, and that Sir William Muir, Principal of Edinburgh University, had taken a seat on Edinburgh’s *Chovevei Zion* council. Furthermore, it is clear that there were leading Zionists in Britain who looked on the involvement of Christians as

⁴⁹ *Otago Witness*, Jan 14, 1892, 26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ SJAC, Paterson to Hirsch, April 13, 1892, and Paterson to Hirsch, January 14, 1893, copy of papers of Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*. Originals held at Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, file: A2/44.

⁵² SJAC, Paterson to Hirsch, April 22, 1893, copy of papers of Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*. Originals held at Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, File: A2/44.

being benign and even as something to be encouraged. In September 1893 the Edinburgh tent was visited by Colonel Albert Goldsmid, who may have been referring to the history of Scottish philosemitism when he informed all present that, “it was also a pleasure to have a tent in Scotland, seeing that there was no nation on the earth nearer akin to the Jewish nation than the Scottish, both in their love of the Bible, and in their sympathy with all that is best in Judaism.”⁵³

It is clear however, that despite the ostensibly good prospects for a Christian Zionist movement in Scotland, based primarily on decades or even centuries of ecclesiastical interest in Jews and their expected restoration to Palestine, Paterson’s Scottish Society for the Restoration of Jews in Palestine failed to achieve even modest success. The reasons for this failure offer insight into not only early Christian attitudes towards Christian Zionism, but also the failings of early Zionism more generally.

Reasons for the Failure of Christian Zionism in Scotland

One of the main reasons for the failure of Christian Zionism in Scotland was its close alliance to *Chovevei Zion*, an organization which was itself fraught with a multitude of problems. The relocation of Jews to Palestine was never achieved on a significant scale by the movement. Howard Sachar has argued that while it was adept at attracting numerous followers, both in Russia and to a lesser extent in the West, “it remained quite ineffective as an agency of immigration,” while Walter Laqueur has remarked more severely that “organisationally and politically the Hoveve Zion was a failure.”⁵⁴ This failure had its roots in the vague and disorganized manner in which the organisation sought its goals, which were arguably just as ambiguous. This ambiguity was most obvious in the western countries, where there was almost no desire on the part of Jews, assimilated or recently arrived, to move on to Palestine. To use a local example, when M. Schapira, “Commandant” of the Edinburgh branch, decided to emigrate from Scotland in 1894, his destination of choice was not Palestine but Canada.⁵⁵ It would have been difficult to enthuse prospective Christian Zionists about the impending restoration of the Jews when it was so apparent that, if anything, a great number of Jews were moving further away from Holy Land.

It also became apparent that apathy towards the Zionist project was not limited to Scottish gentiles. Former Honorary Vice-President of the Zionist Federation Rev. J. K. Goldbloom recalled in 1952 that the influence of the British branches of *Chovevei Zion* “on the man in the street was very small.”⁵⁶ Thus, support for early Zionism was likely to come from a marginal section of British Jewry, just as it came from a marginal

⁵³ *Jewish Chronicle*, Sept 8, 1893, 16.

⁵⁴ Sachar, *History of Israel*, 27; Walter Laqueur, *The History of Zionism* (London: Tauris Parke, 2003), 80.

⁵⁵ *Jewish Chronicle*, April 13, 1894, 19.

⁵⁶ Jacob K. Goldbloom, “Reminiscences of Zionism in Great Britain,” in *The Rebirth of Israel: A Memorial Tribute to Paul Goodman*, ed. Israel Cohen (London: Edward Goldston, 1952), 61.

section of Scottish Christians. Inherently, it would appear, *Chovevei Zion* lacked mass appeal. By 1896, three years following the formal dissolution of its Christian auxiliary, the Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion* began a steady decline. Benjamin Freeman wrote to Dr. Hirsch in July complaining that he couldn't even find a sufficient number of people to hold a meeting, and that this has been the case "for the last couple of years."⁵⁷ The ambiguities of the movement and its failure to achieve significant success in Palestine had also become increasingly evident by that point. By December 1897, with Herzl's vision of Zionism in the ascendant following the Basle Conference, Marcus Levy wrote to Dr. Hirsch demanding that the funds donated by supporters in Edinburgh be better used by London headquarters. The disintegration of the relationship between the Edinburgh branch and headquarters was complete by January 1898, when Levy wrote to Hirsch that:

At our last general meeting the question of our duty to Headquarters was discussed and it has been unanimously agreed to not assist you any more financially until we see you do more practical work in Palestine. It is, I am sorry to say, the general opinion of our members that you have wasted much capital, and much more energy, enthusiasm and hope of those that have entrusted themselves to be led by you.⁵⁸

Of course, one must still account for the fact that while a small group of senior and influential Scottish clergy were heavily involved in the Edinburgh branch, this involvement never encompassed the support of the Church of Scotland *as a Church*, or any of the lesser Presbyterian denominations. Nor did *Chovevei Zion* ever enjoy the support of "all Scotland," as Paterson had hoped.

Arguably, reasons for the lack of ecclesiastical support from the Kirk may lie in the Church of Scotland's understanding of the restoration, as outlined in its influential series of lectures in 1838, and more specifically, the question of whether conversion was an essential prerequisite to the restoration. In the main, Protestant thought in both England and Scotland held that conversion of the Jews would precede the restoration, and this was reflected to a great extent in the conversionist movements mentioned previously. In the seventeenth century, Joseph Mede, a cleric at Cambridge, wrote in his *The Mystery of St. Paul's Conversion* that, in order for Jews to convert, their Diaspora should be ended and they should be restored to a kingdom in "Canaan." But this concept of a "preeschatological restoration of the Jews" was notable for being "peculiarly novel," and never achieved widespread support.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the Church of Scotland's approach to the subject was never clearly defined in its 1838 lecture series. In his chapter on

⁵⁷ Letter from B. L. Freeman to Dr. Hirsch, July 13, 1896, PECZ.

⁵⁸ Letter from Marcus Levy to Dr. Hirsch, Jan 8, 1898, PECZ.

⁵⁹ Nabil I. Matar, "George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and the Conversion of the Jews," *Studies in English Literature, 1550–1900* 30, no. 1 (1990), 81. See also "The Idea of the Restoration of the Jews in English Protestant Thought, 1661–1701," *Harvard Theological Review* 78, nos 1–2 (1985): 115–48.

the future prospects of the Jews, Rev. Patrick Fairbairn stated that the primary means of aiding the restoration of the Jews should be the promotion of “the work of their conversion.”⁶⁰ Rather ambiguously, however, Fairbairn articulated that there was some “doubt” as to “whether the *entire* [original italics] conversion of the Jewish people shall have taken place before the era of their restoration.”⁶¹ This ambiguity helps explain how it was possible for the conversion of the Jews to remain a major aspect of Church policy, and at the same time offers an explanation for the lack of support for Zionism from the Church more generally. This ambiguity also allowed enough of a loophole for individual Christians to devote their energies to aiding the Zionist cause without coming into conflict with a clearly defined Church policy.

Despite Paterson’s apparently unsuccessful appeal to the prevailing climate of xenophobia which permeated British politics in the last decade of the nineteenth century, non-Jewish support for a Scottish Christian Zionist organisation would have had to rely first and foremost on religious foundations. In this respect, Paterson’s efforts to encourage the support of the laity for his Christian auxiliary would have suffered from a lack of official Church backing, and this difficulty would have been compounded still further by the fact that church-going and religiosity in Scotland had been in steady decline since the 1850s.⁶² Perhaps unsurprisingly, Scottish Christian Zionism in the late nineteenth century was a niche within a niche.

Conclusion

The involvement of prominent Christians in the Edinburgh *Chovevei Zion*, and their efforts to create a Scottish Christian Zionist organisation emerged from an historical tradition of Scottish Presbyterian interest in Jews, Judaism, and Palestine. This interest culminated in the establishment, in 1838, of the Church of Scotland’s mission to the Jews. This decision, and the articulation of the Kirk’s position on Jews and the restoration had a significant influence on its “daughter churches” and other Presbyterian churches as far afield as the United States. While this interest manifested itself most coherently in the Church of Scotland’s resolution to convert Jews around the globe, and to focus exclusively on Jews as the target of conversionist activity, the position of the Church in relation to Palestine was less clearly expressed. It was generally agreed that Jews should and would be restored to Palestine, yet it was never clearly defined whether the Church of Scotland should support this move or how and when the Church of Scotland should support the restoration. This ambiguity, coupled with ongoing ecclesiastical interest in Jews and their conversion, resulted in some senior Church of Scotland ministers, as well as influential members of the laity, lending their support to local Zionist groups—in

⁶⁰ Church of Scotland. *Course of Lectures*, 431.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 58.

their view, the most local and immediate sign that “the Jews themselves” had begun their “return.”

This co-operation was welcomed by Edinburgh’s Jewish Zionist leaders, though the relationship never bore the fruit expected of it. The vague nature of the Church of Scotland’s position regarding the restoration, and the resultant absence of official Church support for the activities of Paterson, would have severely hampered Paterson’s efforts to gain support for Zionism comparable to the support enjoyed by the mission committees. The weak support that Christians were able to give to the Edinburgh branch was rendered largely ineffectual by the fact that *Chovevei Zion* in Britain suffered from a myriad of problems, not least its inability to clarify its goals or its methods to achieve them, and its corresponding difficulty in attracting and maintaining support from the Jewish “man on the street.”

Perhaps one of the key findings of this, quite specific, case study is that there is a need for more research to be carried out into the attitudes of the Christian churches, particularly evangelical churches, towards Zionism, and more specifically, interactions between evangelicals and Zionist organisations before the establishment of the State of Israel. The context of these interactions, how commonplace these interactions were, the factors which influenced their failure or success, and their lasting impact are questions that remain largely unanswered.