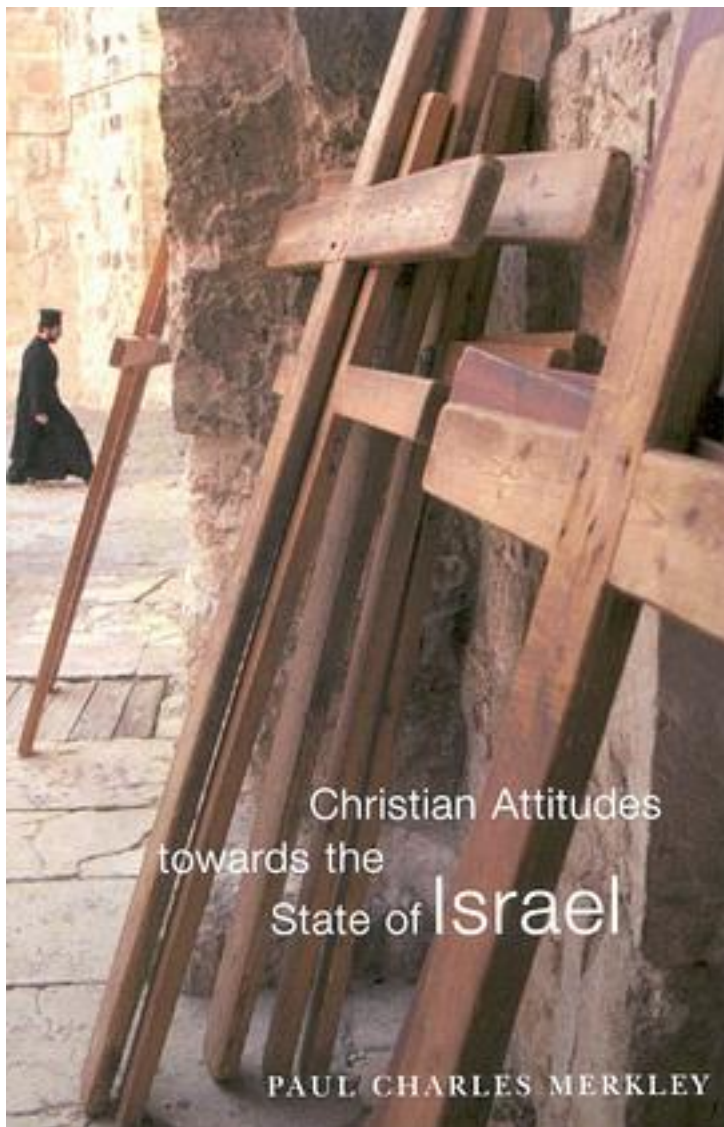


Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel



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When the United Nations debated the future of the 'Mandate of Palestine' in 1947, world opinion was powerfully affected by news of the Holocaust and the plight of Jewish refugees. This momentary humanitarian advantage aided Christian Zionists in mobilising public opinion on behalf of Israel. Almost as soon as it became clear that the Jews had won their war for independence, however, anti-Zionist elements within Christianity reasserted themselves. At the World Council of Churches - established only a few weeks after the State of Israel was formed - a pro-Arab bloc of Western missionaries echoed the anti-Zionism that has always characterised Eastern churches and the Roman Catholic Church, which had never been friendly to Zionism, championed the cause of 'internationalisation' of the city of Jerusalem in order to diminish Jewish presence in the heart of the Holy Land. Paul Merkley draws on the published literature of the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and other Christian organisations that have an interest in the question of Israel's past, present, and future, and on interviews with numerous key figures within the government of Israel, spokesmen for the Palestine Authority, and leaders of all the major pro and anti-Zionist Christian organisations to demonstrate that Christian attitudes towards Israel remain remarkably polarised. To most evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, loyalty to Israel is a kind of second patriotism, nurtured by the conviction that Israel's restoration is a part of God's plan for history. However mainstream Protestantism champions 'Palestinian nationalism' and, drawing on the rhetoric of the Middle East Council of Churches, does not hesitate to portray Israel as an 'oppressor'. Merkley concludes that Christian attitudes towards Israel reflect fundamental theological attitudes that must be studied against the long historical background of Christian attitudes towards Judaism and Islam.

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