



A Century of Jewish Opposition to Zionism

by Yakov M Rabkin

When in the late 19th century political Zionism proclaimed that Jews should gather in Palestine to form a separate nation, this idea, while warmly supported by the anti-Semites, repelled the vast majority of Jews. Most of the principled and enduring opposition came from Jewish religious and spiritual leaders. Nor has the opposition died away over a century later. *Au nom de la Torah: une histoire de l'opposition juive au sionisme* (<http://www.ulaval.ca/pul/catalogue/shum-edu/2-7637-8024-5.html>), presents a history of opposition to Zionism from within Judaism and Jewish values, an opposition that invokes Judaism as a religion. It sheds startling new light on the distinctions between Judaism and Zionism, between Diaspora Jews and the State of Israel, and as it does, challenges the myths that lie at the very root of contemporary or “new” anti-Semitism.

Fire-bombings of Jewish schools in France and Belgium, and attacks on synagogues in Turkey and Tunisia must be seen as the most recent fallout from a conflict that has festered for over a century: the clash between the Zionists and local inhabitants of Palestine. Why do these assaults target Jewish institutions in the

Diaspora? Why are Hassidic children in Antwerp, who were attacked by terrorists, held responsible for the actions of Israeli soldiers in Jenin?

Jewish complicity with the State of Israel is easy to suspect; in fact, it appears almost natural. This is particularly true of the anti-Semites, who have long believed in the existence of a world Jewish conspiracy, of specifically Jewish political interests, allegedly nefarious for the rest of mankind. But identifying the Jews with the State of Israel is also essential for the Zionists, who have claimed, ever since the Zionist movement first took root among the Jews of Europe over a century ago, that they constitute the vanguard of the entire Jewish people.

This topic often provokes more anger than debate. This book has been written to defuse that anger, and to encourage debate. It gives readers the historical and theological background for the religious rejection of Zionism and sharpens the often-blurred distinctions between Jews and Judaism, on the one hand, and between Zionism and the State of Israel, on the other. Dire warnings voiced at the birth of Zionism have come to sound prophetic against the distressing news from the Middle East. The anti-Zionists have claimed all along that far from “solving the Jewish question” and offering Jews a safe haven, Zionism would only fan hatred of the Jews.

CRITICAL OPINION

Noam Chomsky, MIT, USA: An extremely interesting and valuable book.

Joseph Hodara, Bar-Ilan University, Israel: This book sheds light on religious anti-Zionism, which, demographically and ideologically, represents the most serious threat to Israel as a State and as a collective identity. In fact, it is a more grievous and dangerous challenge than Arab and Palestinian hostility.

Charles Rhéaume, Department of National Defense, Canada: This is a capital book that comes at the very time that “the eternal Middle East question” demands new approaches that may defuse the crisis. This is why this book must be read without delay by the greatest number of people possible.

Joseph Agassi, Tel-Aviv University, Israel: As an Israeli patriot and as a philosopher, I consider it essential to integrate the discourse of Judaic anti-Zionism into the badly needed public debate about our past, present and future.