

## **Why Would a Christian Leader Say: “to Stand Against Israel is to Stand Against God”?**

### **Introduction**

As a Palestinian Evangelical, I am like many Arab Christians who are interested in understanding why do Fundamental Evangelicals in the United States support the state of Israel<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the answer of this question is complex and would require extensive research beyond the limitations of this paper. Consequently, I am limiting my research to the founder and director of “Moral Majority” (1979-1989), Jerry Falwell, whom is considered one of the most prominent figures in Fundamentalism<sup>2</sup>. For example, Merrill Simon describes him as “a spiritual leader who touches tens of millions of Americans.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, many Israeli Prime Ministers noted his strong influence on American public opinion and sought to meet him. Thus, I believe that this study in not without merit. Indeed, I hope that studying Falwell’s influence will bring us one step closer to understanding the rationale behind supporting the state of Israel in Fundamental circles in the 1980s. In short, I limited my research by focusing on one leader and by focusing it on one decade (1979-1989), from the founding of “Moral Majority” to its dissolve on June 11, 1989<sup>4</sup>. This does not mean ignoring the socio-political, theological, and historical factors in previous decades. Instead, it means utilizing our understanding from previous times to clarify the reasons behind Falwell’s support of the state of Israel and to observe the perpetuation of certain pertinent *Israelological* beliefs<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Further information about Christians in the Middle East could be found in Betty Jane and J. Martin Bailey, *Who Are the Christians in the Middle East?* Grand Rapid: Eerdmans, 2003. Further information about Palestinian Christians could be found in Mitri Raheb, *I am a Palestinian Christian*, translated by Ruth Gritsch. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. Unfortunately, I have not yet seen any books written about Evangelical Palestinians.

<sup>2</sup> From now on, I will use the word “Fundamentalists” or “Fundamentalism” to refer to Evangelical Fundamentalists in the United States. I am well aware that the shorter label is also used for many other groups from different parts of the world. However, I hope that this clarification will eliminate any misunderstanding. Furthermore, I am not saying that all Evangelicals or all conservative Evangelicals are Fundamentalists. The latter two terms are paramount in some religious circles and this false equality confuses many people. This does negate the fact that there are many connections between these different labels. Last, I will not discuss these connections. Instead, I will focus my work on Fundamentalism especially Jerry Falwell in 1980s.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill Simon, *Jerry Falwell and the Jews* with a foreword by Emmanuel Rackman (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1984), 104. Many authors from significantly different backgrounds agree with Simon that Jerry’s influence is important. For further details, the reader could consult the bibliographical list that Susan Harding provides. Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalists Language and Politics* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000), 313-328.

<sup>4</sup> Although the “Moral Majority” dissolved in 1989, its ideology and influence survives in many contemporary Evangelical circles. It lives on especially in the Christian Coalition of America. Further information about the Christian Coalition could be obtained from their web page. Christian Coalition of America, accessed 18 October 2003; available from [www.cc.org](http://www.cc.org).

Focusing my research on Rev. Falwell is based on several reasons: 1) he is an active well known Fundamentalist; 2) he is consciously involved in influencing the American public opinion; 3) he combines between politics and religion; and 4) his efforts are recognized and appreciated by the state of Israel. These points will be seen in the following paragraphs where I am placing Falwell in his historical context in order to represent him fairly<sup>6</sup>. The data is presented in chronological order.

### **Falwell's Background and Context**

Falwell is a Baptist Minister from Lynchburg-Virginia<sup>7</sup>. He was born on August 11, 1933 in a troubled family. His father killed his uncle who was the troublemaker of Lynchburg. This incident shaped the future of his father and the rest of the family. Although, the court declared his father "not guilty", this proclamation did not change his father's lifestyle. Instead, he became alcoholic and suffered until his deathbed conversion. At that time Jerry was only fifteen years old; however, the memory of his father will continue to shape his life for a long time.

On January 20, 1952 Jerry became a follower of Christ at Park Avenue Baptist Church. The youth pastor of the church, Jack Dinsbeer, trained him and encouraged him to become a full time minister. As a result, he went to Baptist Bible College in Springfield-Missouri and earned his B.A. Soon after his graduation, he became the pastor of 35 members who left Park Avenue Baptist Church. Later, this church of dissenters became one of the biggest Baptist Churches in the world and it has now more than 22000 people<sup>8</sup>. Clearly, Thomas Road Baptist Church is the core of his ministry and the spiritual mother of many other ministries, such as, the radio and television Old Time Gospel Hour, and Liberty University.

On January 23, 1973 Jerry was extremely disturbed by the Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion. This issue was the first spark that convinced him of the importance of engaging culture and influencing the American public opinion. In 1979, his efforts gave birth to the first board of directors of the Moral Majority. The board

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<sup>5</sup> Further information about Israelology could be found in: Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, Revised ed. Tustin: Ariel Ministries, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> The reader can deduce these four points from Falwell's autobiography. Jerry Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

<sup>7</sup> The following description of Falwell is based on his own Autobiography. Obviously, it is selective.

<sup>8</sup> For further information about Thomas Road Baptist Church, you can visit their web page [www.trbc.org](http://www.trbc.org).

included four Baptist pastors and one Presbyterian<sup>9</sup>. They were a) pro-life, b) pro-traditional family, c) pro-moral, and d) pro-American which, in their mind, meant being pro-national defense and pro-Israel<sup>10</sup>. And they hoped to promote their goals by establishing a big voting block. They wanted “to politicize and unify the frustrated and fragmented conservative, fundamentalist religious community and mold it into a political voting block”<sup>11</sup>.

In 1979, Israel gave Falwell a Lear Jet (a private airplane) and in 1981 he received the Jabotinsky Award in New York<sup>12</sup>. This award is named after Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880-1940), a Jewish militant Zionist from Russia, the founder of so-called Revisionist Zionism, who advocated a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan River. In 1981, Menachem Begin Prime Minister of Israel called Falwell asking for his support after the Israeli bombing of an Iraqi nuclear facility. These few incidents reveal how the state of Israel appreciated the support of Jerry Falwell and it uncovers his importance in their eyes. Indeed Falwell is a significant Fundamentalist who supports Israel. But why does he support the state of Israel? Falwell answers this question by stating three main reasons: 1) humanitarian, 2) political, and 3) theological<sup>13</sup>.

### **Falwell’s Reasons for Supporting Israel**

First, Falwell supports the state Israel for humanitarian reasons. Like many Americans, Falwell feels a commitment towards the Jews and thus towards the state of Israel. He believes that supporting Israel is the antidote of anti-Semitism. Obviously he wants to terminate anti-Semitism from America and other places by directing people towards supporting Israel and thus changing the long history of Christian-Jewish animosity. Almost all of the questions of Merrill Simon, a Jewish leader, were colored by fears from Christian radicalism that showed its ugly face and terrified the Jews through out the ages. Thus, in order to better understand Falwell’s rationale and Simon’s questions we must at least present a very short survey of anti-Semitism.

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<sup>9</sup> They are: D. James Kennedy (pastor of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale-Florida), Charles Stanely (pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta-Georgia), Tim LaHaye (pastor of the Scott Memorial Baptist Church in El Cajon-California), Greg Dixon (pastor of the Indianapolis Baptist Temple), and Jerry Falwell (pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church).

<sup>10</sup> Falwell, *Strength for the Journey: An Autobiography*, 363.

<sup>11</sup> Public Eye, *group watch: Moral Majority*, accessed October 6, 2003; available from: [http://www.publiceye.org/research/Group\\_Watch/Entries-92.htm](http://www.publiceye.org/research/Group_Watch/Entries-92.htm).

<sup>12</sup> Donald Wagner, “Evangelicals and Israel: Theological Roots of a Political Alliance,” *Christian Century* (Nov. 1998): 1020-1026. It is available on the web, accessed on October 10, 2003; available from [http://www.findarticles.com/cf\\_0/m1058/1998\\_Nov\\_4/53227143/p5/article.jhtml?term=](http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m1058/1998_Nov_4/53227143/p5/article.jhtml?term=).

<sup>13</sup> Simon, 63-64. Falwell uses these arguments to influence the American public opinion and convince them to support the state of Israel. Thus, understanding his convictions help us to understand his motivations. Furthermore, Falwell’s arguments are still popular in contemporary Fundamentalism.

Clearly, anti-Semitism has continued to exist throughout the ages. Contemporary Jews are rightly concerned about any signs of its spread. The history of Christian atrocities and persecution against the Jews fills the pages of history. It was seen among prominent church fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa or John Chrysostom, in the Crusaders' period and throughout the Middle Ages when Jews were considered devils and child-killers, during the reformation whether under the leadership of Luther or Calvin, and all the way to the twentieth century especially in the bloody holocaust. Furthermore, it was seen in America, including Virginia, Falwell's State.

Indeed, the New World is not innocent from the charge of anti-Semitism. The first recorded anti-Semitic public action in America was made in 1654 by Peter Stuyvesant who wanted to banish the Jews from what we call today New York. The ideology of excluding the Jews and blaming them for any catastrophe continued to exist in early America, the colonial period, America in the 1800s, Pre WWI years, Interwar years, and even post WWII years. It was seen in different movements or figures<sup>14</sup> such as, Henry Ford (1863-1947), William Dudley Pelley (1890-1965)<sup>15</sup>, Gerald L.K. Smith (1898-1976- a Baptist minister), Gerald B. Winrod (1900-1957- Kansas Evangelist), Father Charles E. Coughlin (1891-1979, a Catholic Priest)<sup>16</sup>, and the infamous Ku Klux Klan<sup>17</sup>.

Many Fundamentalists were guilty of promoting the Anglo-Saxon superiority, in addition to marginalizing and attacking minorities including the Jews. Obviously, in this context, American Jews are skeptical about the Fundamentalists' motivations. Merrill Simon tries to expel these fears concerning Falwell. He says that the latter was raised as a southerner in rural areas at a time when it was accepted to call blacks "niggers" and to envision Jews as people with "horns and tails" but "Falwell's views have undergone drastic-almost revolutionary- changes since his formative years"<sup>18</sup>. Bluntly, Simon presents before Falwell the fears of the Jewish community in America saying that American Jews "can't perceive of an evangelical organization as bringing any good" to

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<sup>14</sup> These movements are figures are elaborated in: 1) Leonard Dinnerstein, *Anti-Semitism in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. 2) Michael Selzer, editor, *Kike: Anti-Semitism in America*. New York: World Publishing, 1972. 3) Many pertinent web pages (for example, look at footnote 15-17).

<sup>15</sup> Further information about Pelley could be found in: A.V. Schaeffenberg, *The Live of William Dudley Pelly*, edited by William McCoy; accessed on October 25, 2003; available from [http://www.geocities.com/bobmeyer\\_us/pelley.html](http://www.geocities.com/bobmeyer_us/pelley.html).

<sup>16</sup> Further information about Father Coughlin messages could be found in <http://www.ssa.gov/history/cough.html>; accessed on October 25, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Look at the articles about Ku Klux Kan in Encyclopedia.com, available from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/searchpool.asp?target=@DOCTITLE%20Ku%20Klux%20Klan>; accessed October 28, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Simon, 104.

them<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, they are rightly paranoid of anti-Semitism, demonizing their race, and forfeiting their basic human rights. Many of them saw in the state of Israel the answer of their pain, injustices, and centuries of landlessness. To attack the existence of Israel is to attack their basic elements of security and existence. No wonder, Falwell response to Simon's concerns emphasizes supporting the state of Israel as the antidote of anti-Semitism. Jerry saw the state of Israel as the humanitarian answer for the long history of the suffering of the Jews.

He wanted to assure them that he understands their need to live safely as any other human being. As a result, he accepted the term Judeo-Christian that promotes according to Finklestein religious pluralism<sup>20</sup>. Furthermore, he rejected the concept of Christianizing America and ridiculed it in order to assure the Jews that Fundamentalism is safe and does not promote anti-Semitic sentiments<sup>21</sup>. He wanted to distance himself from the crusaders and people like Jim Jones<sup>22</sup>.

Second, Falwell supports the state of Israel for socio-political reasons. As you might have noticed, I expanded Falwell's label, political, to socio-political. It seems to me that we can't fully understand Falwell's political motives without some cultural and/or socio-political backgrounds. Gladly, Susan Harding, a social scientist, has studied Falwell's contributions and has provided us with helpful backgrounds<sup>23</sup>. Harding labels Falwell's school of thought as a kind of cultural politics<sup>24</sup>. She tries to understand how Fundamental Christians interpret reality and concludes that, in the 1980s, "Bible prophecy was the lens through which twenty to thirty million Bible-believing Christians in America read current history and the daily news"<sup>25</sup>. Then she discusses the

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>20</sup> American's commitment to Jews is a complex socio-political and theological phenomenon. In an unpublished article, Fred W. Beuttler discusses Louis Finklestein role in making Judaism America's third democratic religion. He describes how Finklestein had to face anti-Semitism and Secularism. In facing the latter, Finklestein promotes spiritual federalism and religious pluralism, not secular pluralism. In this context, Judaism is accepted as an equal partner to Catholicism and Protestantism and the phrase Judeo-Christian tradition is coined to reflect these beliefs.

<sup>21</sup> Simon, 115.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 116. Jim Jones was a pastor who led his congregation to commit a group suicide (914 people, including children, died). Further information about the Jim Jones tragedy could be found in: Religious Tolerance, The People's Temple; accessed on October 26, 2003; available from [http://www.religioustolerance.org/dc\\_jones.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/dc_jones.htm).

<sup>23</sup> Susan Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 232. Please note that Harding is talking about the 1980s. This figure is bigger today.

relationship of the Bible to history in Fundamentalism and concludes that Fundamentalists read history backwards. The future events are fixed and known and they shape the present reality<sup>26</sup>. This backward reading of history is consistent throughout the 1970s and 1980s<sup>27</sup>. In the 1970s, it motivated many Fundamentalists to spread the gospel before the return of Christ and it determined their view of history, namely, history is regressing and Fundamentals should not waste their time in political activism. Instead, they must proclaim the good news and save sinners from this burning world whose destruction is imminent.

This ideology squared well with their premillennial faith but did not fit well with their patriotism. What about America's role? In their system, the Middle East is the center of God's eschatological plans and Israel, not America, is the center of the world. Should then Americans be concerned about the progress or regress of their society and its moral standards? And if they are concerned, should they take any political actions? How can they justify such actions in their gestalt?

Harding considers similar questions and convincingly argues for an ideological shift in Fundamentalism<sup>28</sup>. She believes that, unlike the 1970s, Fundamentalists, in the 1980s, integrated the future of America into their agenda. This shift is seen in the following examples: a) in 1970, in their best-seller book, Lindsey and Carlson wrote, "It is clear that the U.S. cannot be the leader of the West in the future"<sup>29</sup>. They assumed that the Middle East is the center of the world and political activism in America will not answer "the basic and visceral questions of man"; thus, Americans need to step aside and "give God a chance to present his views"<sup>30</sup>. In 1980 Lindsey wrote "The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon", in which he had a whole chapter on the U.S. He argued that the United States foreign policy has strengthened the U.S.S.R. control of the world and that many high officials in U.S. Secretary of State have promoted global dominion of communism. Then he adds, "I believe it is high time for the citizens of this country to clean this "elite" group out of the Department of State and replace it with some people

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 230. Since the Scopes trial and in continuity with German higher criticism, many attacked the Bible and felt that it cannot survive scientific scrutiny. They were trained in scientific epistemologies but were at a great disadvantage before those who claimed that the Bible is true based on its prophetic nature. These prophetic arguments were appealing to millions of people.

<sup>27</sup> I would assume that it is still dominant today. Furthermore, it will continue to be the dominant view of premillennialism. However, further research is needed to argue for this point.

<sup>28</sup> I followed Harding's argument closely; however, I expanded her argument and used more illustrations to argue for this shift. I also tried to place Falwell in the pertinent shift.

<sup>29</sup> Hal Lindsey and C. C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth: A Penetrating Look at Incredible Prophecies Involving This Generation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), p. 161.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 6.

with common sense and courage”<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, he says that the Bible “supports building a powerful military force. And the Bible is telling the U.S. to become strong again”<sup>32</sup>. However, in order to obey this divine commandment, Christians must get involved in preserving America<sup>33</sup>. They must continue to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to pray, to send missionaries, and to support Jews and the state of Israel<sup>34</sup>.

B) Our second example is Tim LaHaye<sup>35</sup>. In the 1970s time wrote “Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain” and “The Beginning of the End”<sup>36</sup>. In the former he outlines the book of Revelation and unfolds the future in a chronological way leading us to twentieth century Christianity, which he relates to the Church of Laodicea and declares God’s condemnation on it<sup>37</sup>. In the same book, he opposes political activism and attacks its promoters saying, “The pulpits of churches are being used today as sounding boards for racial agitation which depicts the blindness of these churches because they are striving to solve man’s racial problems externally or by means of education”<sup>38</sup>. In the latter book, LaHaye also gives a very pessimistic view of the future of this world and implies that America is part of the apostate world that will be destroyed. He says, “the depressing conditions presently ensnaring our society should not make us despondent. Instead, we should anticipate the Lord’s coming every day”<sup>39</sup>. In short, he is not calling for reforming the culture or for political activism. Unlike the 1970s, in 1980 LaHaye focuses on America’s domestic and foreign policy. In “The Battle for the Mind”, he says, “We Christians have almost totally abandoned the second-most important field for

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<sup>31</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The 1980’s: Countdown To Armageddon* (Pennsylvania: Westgate Press Inc., 1980), p. 154.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-176.

<sup>35</sup> Dr. LaHaye is only one of the founding members of Moral Majority but he is also an influential and prolific author. He has written more than 50 non-fiction books on a wide range of topics including prophecy. Furthermore, he is best know for his fiction writing especially the left behind series which according to his web page is the all-time best selling Christian fiction series with more than 60 million sold. It is also interesting to note that Dr. LaHaye received a Doctorate of Literature from Liberty University. For further details look up: Tim LaHaye, *Biography* in Tim LaHaye Ministries; accessed October 20, 2003; available from [http://www.timlahaye.com/about\\_ministry/index.php3?p=bio&section=Biography](http://www.timlahaye.com/about_ministry/index.php3?p=bio&section=Biography).

<sup>36</sup> Tim LaHaye, *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973; Revised edition 1975; Tenth reprint, July 1978. Tim LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End*, Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972; Sixth printing, June 1973.

<sup>37</sup> In part I of his book, LaHaye outlines the chronological history of the world and places the church of Laodicea as the last church before the rapture.

<sup>38</sup> LaHaye, *Revelation: Illustrated and Made Plain*, 63.

<sup>39</sup> Tim LaHaye, *The Beginning of the End*, 172.

influencing people today – government”<sup>40</sup>. Then he adds that the personal experience of faith in Jesus Christ is not sufficient; we must provide moral leadership to society i.e. via political activism<sup>41</sup>. But how can LaHaye reconcile his political activism with his dispensational pacifist pessimism? LaHaye accepts the irreversibility of Israel’s tribulation but says that America’s tribulation is different. It “is neither predestined nor necessary”<sup>42</sup>. By encouraging Fundamentalists to move towards political activism, LaHaye is widening America’s political support for Israel<sup>43</sup>. He believes that the most significant reason for America’s blessings is her national policy towards Israel. Israel military force is the “Achilles heel to the Soviets design for world supremacy”<sup>44</sup>. And thus Israel’s military force is in America’s best interest.

These two examples help to illustrate the pertinent ideological shift. Nancy Ammerman discusses this shift and illustrates it by a number of politico-religious groups that were organized in the 1980s. Some of these groups are: the Religious Roundtable, The American Coalition for Traditional Values, Christian Voice, and Moral Majority<sup>45</sup>. These groups were founded in order to influence the public opinion and as a result protect traditional values in the United States. They reflect an ideological shift from separatism to political activism.

Grace Halsell illustrates this shift from the perspective of American Jews and Fundamentalists. She argues that Jews and Fundamentalists were not only separated geographically but also ideologically. The former are liberals and the latter are conservatives<sup>46</sup>. Thus why should they become partners? In order to answer this question, Halsell illustrates the history of American Jews and their American allies in the

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<sup>40</sup> Tim LaHaye, *The Battle for the Mind* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1980), p. 186. On page 190 LaHaye describes political inactivity as unwise, and on page 191 he states that he changed his mind and moved away from political inactivity five years ago.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>43</sup> LaHaye clearly states that Christians should make every effort to biblically justify American national policy to defend Israel. Although this statement is made after September 11, 2001, the concept is found in many of his books. Tim LaHaye, *The Prophetic Significance of Sept. 11, 2001* in Tim LaHaye Ministries; accessed October 20, 2003; available from [http://www.timlahaye.com/about\\_ministry/index.php3?p=sept11\\_tlm&section=Prophetic%20Significance](http://www.timlahaye.com/about_ministry/index.php3?p=sept11_tlm&section=Prophetic%20Significance).

<sup>44</sup> Tim LaHaye, *The Coming Peace in the Middle East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 167.

<sup>45</sup> Nancy Ammerman, North American Protestant Fundamentalism, in *Fundamentalisms Observed*, edited by M.E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 43.

<sup>46</sup> Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Company, 1986), 146. In the chapter titled: Why Israel Sought the Alliance With the New Christian Right (pp. 145-160), Halsell explains the history of the relationship of American Jews and Fundamentalists.

twentieth century. From 1948-1967 American Jews were allies with the National Council of Churches (NCC) and with U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops<sup>47</sup>. They had good relationships with Presbyterians, Methodists and Episcopalians who taught against anti-Semitism in their schools. After the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, the NCC joined the United Nations in calling for the end of Israeli occupation of Arab lands<sup>48</sup>. In 1980, the NCC supported establishing a Palestinian State; their position convinced many American Jews to look for other allies<sup>49</sup>. Fundamentalists were more than ready to accept American Jews as allies who will help them to impact the American public opinion.

They wanted to create a pro-religion culture, and were willing to abandon their separatism in order to open a new page with American Jews. Although, the history of anti-Semitism in Fundamentalist circles is scary, contemporary realities convinced both parties to join their efforts<sup>50</sup>. For example, Falwell's Moral Majority wanted to influence the public opinion and engage it in order to protect traditional family values. They were willing to include Jews, and other groups who agree with their policy. They justified this shift on the grounds of evangelism and missions. In their mind, America must stay righteous and resist the spirit of humanism who prevents Fundamentalists from sharing their beliefs freely. Also, America must stay strong so that Fundamentalists will continue to send missionaries around the world. In short, Falwell's Moral Majority sought a spiritual revival and a political renewal at the same time.

In this context, we can better understand Falwell's ideological shift especially his desire to influence the public opinion and to create more bridges with American Jews, an influential group. Clearly, his views towards the state of Israel could serve him to build bridges with Jews and with Fundamentalists who believe in the importance of the eschatological destiny of national Israel.

Falwell expressed his views of Israel to Merrill Simon saying that the state of Israel and the United States are connected politically at several levels<sup>51</sup>. A) Both parties

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<sup>47</sup> For further information about these two organizations, the reader could visit their web pages: 1) the web page of the National Council of Churches is <http://www.ncccusa.org>, 2) the web page of U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops is <http://www.usccb.org>.

<sup>48</sup> I am referring to UN Security Council Resolution 242 in which Israel is called to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967. The Resolution also affirms achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem. United Nations. Security Council Resolution 242; accessed October 22, 2003; available from <http://ods-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/240/94/IMG/NR024094.pdf?OpenElement>.

<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, Emanuel Rackman, on page VII in his foreword to Simon's book, explains that Israel's support between 1967-1973 was dwindling around the world. Israel can no longer base its support only on the six million American Jews. A wider base is needed. Fundamental Christians were the best candidates who can influence American public opinion and muster politicians to support the state of Israel.

<sup>50</sup> Dinnerstein illustrates the history of anti-Semitism among Evangelical Americans.

<sup>51</sup> These reasons came about as a result of studying Falwell's comments on the state of Israel in Merrill Simon's book (pp. 59-99).

have a similar democratic ideology. They are unlike Arabs who refuse the American way of life and promote a totalitarian system seeking to regain lost territories and to aggrandize new ones. B) Supporting Israel is the antidote of anti-Semitism. C) Israel is a stumbling block against the Soviet Union dominion. Many Fundamentalist writings in the 1980s expressed their fears from the spread of communism and of the power of the Soviet Union who possess nuclear powers. They believed that according to scriptures, the Soviet Union is going to dominate the world and possibly destroy America. The Soviets will control the oil of the Middle East and attack Israel, America's alley. However, God will interfere to protect Israel and thus through the latter America's hope of destroying the enemy (U.S.S.R) will be accomplished. But now, Israel needs America's help and must be protected.

Third, Falwell supports the state of Israel for theological reasons. In 1982, in an article edited by Falwell, John Feinberg who was the chairman of the Department of Theological Studies at Liberty Baptist Seminary explained why Christians should support Israel<sup>52</sup>. In four points he presents a typical theology of premillennial pretribulational coming of Christ with the full blessing of Falwell who subscribes to the same school of thought<sup>53</sup>. A) There are two peoples of God, Israel and the Church, or the national and the spiritual respectively<sup>54</sup>. God distinguished the former with "socio-politico-economic blessings"<sup>55</sup>. B) God's Abrahamic covenant with national Israel is unconditional. Unconditionally and without limiting receiving the divine promise by Israel's obedience, the Lord promised her all of historic Palestine as well as other portions of the Middle East. "Biblically, prophetically, and ultimately, the "land" will include that area promised to Abraham in Genesis 15: 18"<sup>56</sup>. C) Prophetically, there are several things that are stored for Israel: 1) in unbelief, they will return to the land before the tribulation and reveal God's providence in "the miracle of statehood"<sup>57</sup>, 2) Israel will have a government and make a seven year covenant with the Beast, 3) Israel will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem and will offer animal sacrifices, 4) Israel will go through unparalleled persecution, 5) at Armageddon God will deliver national Israel from political persecution

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<sup>52</sup> Feinberg wrote an article in the first issue of *Fundamentalism Journal* that was edited by Jerry Falwell and reflected his beliefs. John Feinberg, "Why Christians Should Support Israel?" *Fundamentalism Journal* 1 (Sep. 1982): 10-17.

<sup>53</sup> Feinberg's structure is guiding my presentation and documentation of the views of Falwell. Falwell states clearly that he is premillennial pretribulational believer in several places. For example: Jerry Falwell, "The Twenty-First Century and the End of the World," *Fundamentalism Journal* 7 (May 1988): 10.

<sup>54</sup> Answering Merrill Simon, Falwell assures that Israel is still the chosen people of God. Jerry Falwell, "On God's Chosen People," *Fundamentalists Journal* 1 (March 1984): 8.

<sup>55</sup> Feinberg, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Simon, 62.

<sup>57</sup> Falwell, On God's Chosen People, 10.

and lead her to Christ, and 6) Christ will initiate the Millennium Kingdom where Israel will live in peace. D) In view of the previous discussion, Christians should spread this pertinent theology, fight anti-Semitism, pray for the state of Israel, and actively support its divine rights to all her promised land. Falwell adds that God's blessings and curses on nations depend on their relationship with national Israel. He highlights the importance of Israel's statehood and considers it the most important event in history since the Ascension of Christ<sup>58</sup>. And based on KJV of Genesis 12: 3, "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee", Falwell concludes that America unconditionally and "without hesitation" should give "total financial and military support to the State of Israel"<sup>59</sup>. He adds saying that to "stand against Israel is to stand against God."<sup>60</sup>

### **Analysis and Comments**

Industrialism and Nationalism in the United States pushed towards bigger social units bringing together different cultures and religious perspectives and thus leading to the private/public distinction in order to keep the peace and maintain this heterogeneous structure<sup>61</sup>. Consequently, religion became a private matter; however, Falwell who rightly insisted that religion should shape the public opinion rejected excluding the influence of religion and insisted that abandoning it will lead to the destruction of our societies. He emphasized literalism, traditional values, and right behavior or orthopraxy over orthodoxy<sup>62</sup>. And he resisted privatizing God insisting on God's activity in our world and proclaiming the importance of connecting this divine activity to America's national identity. Moreover, Falwell believes that God is active in the world today whether through blessing societies or through bringing his wrath on them. His wrath is seen in pestilences, diseases, earthquakes, and many other medical and natural problems, while his blessing is seen in supernatural divine actions and in providence especially the establishment of the state of Israel. In other words, for Falwell, eschatology is a major indicator of God's existence and activity in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Furthermore, the national identity must reflect God's existence, activity, and moral standards. And in order to accomplish this goal, Falwell insisted on drawing the law from the sacred text<sup>63</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Falwell, *The Twenty-First Century and the End of the World*, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Simon, 64.

<sup>60</sup> Jerry Falwell, *Listen America* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1980), 215.

<sup>61</sup> John Garvey, Introduction: Fundamentalism and Politics, in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, edited by M.E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 14. Garvey has influenced my thinking and evaluation of Falwell even though he is not quoted directly. Although, he discusses Fundamentalism as a movement, many of his comments apply to Falwell as an individual and to Moral Majority as a movement.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-17.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. This phenomenon is not limited to Evangelical Fundamentalists in the US. It is also found in many other fundamentalist movements. Indeed, many have noticed that Jewish Fundamentalists

This sacred text, in Falwell's mind, justifies giving the Holy Land to Israel. Unfortunately, by moving in this direction, Falwell have missed few important things and consequently have harmed the cause of Christ especially in the Middle East. In the following few paragraphs, my intention is not to attack Falwell but to point out few significant dangers in his approach hoping that those who subscribe to his school of thought will be alarmed.

First, Falwell's approach consciously overlooks the injustices against Palestinians whether in 1948 or throughout the history of the state of Israel. Falwell calls the establishment of the state of Israel the "miracle of Statehood" while Palestinians call it (al-nakba – النكبة), the catastrophe. Mitri El Raheb describes this event stating that as a result of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, four hundred eighteen (418) Palestinian towns or villages were completely destroyed<sup>64</sup>. He elaborates explaining that many Palestinian children were killed; many lost their properties and became homeless. More than 712,000 Palestinians lost their homes and became refugees. They lived in very harsh conditions after being kicked out of their own houses. Fortunately, the National Council of Churches and other humanitarian organizations were sympathetic to these Palestinians who were deprived of their basic human rights. Unfortunately, the Israeli oppression against Palestinians continues to this day<sup>65</sup>. Palestinians became the victims of victims, and those who were persecuted by anti-Semitic movements put millions of them under military law for decades and continue to confiscate their lands and suppress them until today<sup>66</sup>. Ironically, in order to control Palestinians the Israeli government follows strategies similar to the ones practiced under anti-Semitic regimes. For example, in order to identify Palestinians quickly, the state of Israel assigned certain colors to their license-car plates and to their I.D. cards. In short, Falwell failed and continues to fail in hearing the cries of the oppressed Palestinians because he is overemphasizing the needs of the oppressor.

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want to base their lives on the halakha (הלכה - rabbinic interpretation of the Law), and Muslim Fundamentalists want to establish an Islamic State based on the Shari'a law (الشريعة الإسلامية).

<sup>64</sup> Raheb, 16. Raheb's description is in agreement with many historians and human right activists. Indeed, the United Nations understood the impact of the Palestinian tragedy and tried to funnel international aid. Further information on Palestinian refugees could be found in: Palestinian Refugee Research Net; accessed on October 28, 2003; available from <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/MEPP/PRRN/prfront.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Gary Burge provides documented details concerning the Israeli injustices against Palestinians since 1948. Gary Burge, *Whose Land? Whose Promise?: What Christians are not being told about Israel and the Palestinians*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003. I think that Burge's book is one of the best evangelical books on the Palestinian Church even though I disagree with some of his assumptions. For further details see my book review of Burge's book on: <http://www.comeandsee.co.il/article.php?sid=492&mode=thread&order=0&a%20href=>.

<sup>66</sup> Alex Awad provides us with a good historical presentation of the struggle over the land with many illustrative maps. Alex Awad. *Through the Eyes of the Victims*. Bethlehem: Bethlehem Bible College, 2001.

In 1998, several Evangelical Palestinian pastors and leaders tried lovingly to point out to Falwell his unjust pro-Israeli, anti-Palestinian stance. They said<sup>67</sup>,

“We, your brothers and sisters in Christ, prayerfully and in the spirit of love, appeal to you to reexamine your positions regarding Israeli policies in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.”

However, Falwell did not respond. Furthermore, in a personal conversation with Dr. Bishara Awad, president of Bethlehem Bible College, he informed me that he and other evangelical Palestinian leaders have invited Dr. Falwell to come and see the Palestinian situation for himself. They invited him to be their guest. Sadly, according to Bishara, Falwell did not respond.

Second Falwell’s approach overlooks divine agape love concerning the inhabitants of the Middle East. His biblical understanding marginalizes the rights of Palestinian Muslims and Christians along with many others in the Middle East, and makes the destiny of the Jews worse than the holocaust. In other words, Falwell’s approach sacrifices the enthusiasm of evangelizing the Middle East and sharing with them God’s love; instead he promotes an eschatological massacre. Dropping divine love from his politico-religious agenda leads him to dogmatism and to parochial interpretations of the Bible.

Last, there are many inconsistencies in Falwell’s theological position whether his understanding of the identity of Israel, the land, or the church<sup>68</sup>. He overlooks the diachronic development of the word Israel and instead adopts a synchronic definition. Consequently, he wrongly equates Israel to the state of Israel. He also overlooks several important biblical texts that explain the theological aspects of the land; instead he limits

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<sup>67</sup> The letter to Jerry Falwell was signed by: 1) Reverend Musa Abu Ali (Bible Baptist Church-Beit Hanina), 2) Reverend Alex Awad (East Jerusalem Baptist Church-Jerusalem), 3) Reverend George Awad (Bible Presbyterian Church-Bethlehem), 4) Reverend (Bassam Bannoura Shepherd Field Baptist Church-Beit Sahour), 5) Reverend Atallah Esawi (Church of God-Aboud), 6) Reverend Naju Issa (Bible Baptist-Jericho), 7) Reverend Munir Kakish (Pentecostal Church – Ramallah), 8) Reverend Ibrahim Mseeh (Local Baptist-Ramallah), 9) Reverend Botrus Mualem (Church of God- Beit Jala), 10) Reverend Magdi Anwar (Missionary Alliance Church- Jerusalem), 11) Reverend Nizar Tuma (Nazarene Church- Jerusalem), and 12) Reverend Nihad Salman (Church of God- Bethlehem). The letter can be retrieved from: Letter to Rev. Jerry Falwell; accessed on October 28, 2003; available from <http://www.salam.org/policy/falwell.html>. According to the above letter, these Palestinian leaders were responding to Falwell’s pro-Israeli statement in page four of the *International Herald Tribune*, January 22, 1998, under the title: Christian Right Backs Israel.

<sup>68</sup> This paper will not discuss these inconsistencies in order to limit its size. However, the reader can see my article, *Christ is the Owner of the Land* which is available from: <http://www.katanacho.com/Christ%20is%20the%20owner%20of%20the%20Land.doc>. In it I provide a more elaborate response to some aspects of pretribulational dispensational theology especially the issue of the “land”.

himself to the territorial aspect of the land, and to territorial and temporal eschatology where righteousness, justice, mercy, and love are less central than eschatological plans and agendas. Finally and sadly, Falwell overlooks his brothers and sisters in Christ who are Palestinians. For him, to stand against Israel is to stand against God but for us to overlook sin and promote injustices is to stand against God.

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