# The zionist now, the messianic yet-to-be Eric H. Yoffie

In an age of theological presumption, Cohen urges modesty and caution. My only argument with his thesis is that he is too restrained; the theological excesses to which he refers are even more dangerous than he suggests, and require a more emphatic rejection.

Zionism calls for the establishment of a sovereign Jewish state in the land of Israel so that the Jewish people may rid itself of foreign rulers and assume control of its own destiny. As Cohen notes, Zionism has succeeded and the goal has been attained. While religious Zionists rejoice in this accomplishment, they have an additional agenda. They understand the possibilities which the State presents for creating a rich and vibrant Jewish life. In particular, religious Zionists see the land and the State of Israel as a framework within which Torah is to be encouraged and observed.

This point is succinctly stated by Moses, who speaks to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4:5, "See, I have imparted to you laws and rules, as the Lord my God has commanded me, for you to abide by in the land which you are about to...occupy." It is true, of course, that Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews have different ideas on the meaning of Torah; nonetheless, both see Israel as a fertile ground for Torah observance, and both look to the biblical and rabbinical teachings which repeatedly emphasize the connection between *Eretz Yisrael* and observing the law.

### Religious Potential, not Actuality

Sadly, the establishment of the Jewish State has not elicited the religious revival for which religious Zionists had hoped. In fact, quite the opposite has occurred, largely because of the religious monopoly that has been granted to a politicized and increasingly extremist Orthodox establishment. Nonetheless, political arrangements are subject to change, and religious Zionists remain convinced that a more favorable religious climate will soon emerge in Israel.

However, it is one thing to see the establishment of the State of Israel as fraught with religious possibilities. It is an entirely different matter to see the State as imbued with theological significance. Let it be plainly said: the State has no theological meaning, and Cohen's strictures in this regard are most welcome. Those who make such claims pro-

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fess to know God's will, and to perceive God's hand in recent historical events. Such claims constitute an extraordinary theological arrogance, and resemble the pseudo-messianism for which we have paid so dearly in earlier historical periods, and which has the potential to undermine the foundations of the State. Israeli military victories which repel Arab invaders are welcome, and territorial conquests may be unavoidable, but to identify either with Torah or the will of God is to confuse theology with the necessities of national existence.

#### We Once Shared Religious Reticence

This view, it should be stressed, has been the position of mainstream Orthodox Zionism for most of this century. Rabbi Yitzhak Reines, who founded Mizrachi in 1902, insisted that messianism was a supernatural phenomenon, and that the coming of the messiah could in no way be accelerated by human action. While he was a fervent advocate of a return to Zion and the establishment of a Jewish state, he was unequivocal in his belief that these actions had not the remotest connection to messianic expectations. With few exceptions, the intellectual and political leaders of Mizrachi remained faithful to Reines' views, even after the State was established in 1948.

Only after 1967 did Reines' restraint and pragmatism give way to today's theological radicalism, which generally relies more on exaggerated patriotism and national chauvinism than on clear theological thinking. Fortunately, non-Orthodox Zionists have never accepted it, and many in the Orthodox world find it uncongenial and dangerous. They understand that the real task of the religious Zionist is, in Cohen's words, "the building of a holy community"—a task which is difficult enough on its own terms without professing to know more than one can ever know about God's role in history and His/Her relationship to the still-infant State of Israel.

## The zionism of classic jewish faith

#### Louis Bernstein

Arthur Cohen's contention of a conflict between theology and Zionism apparently means Religious Zionism. Zionism is a secular movement and, as such, should not and does not function within the same parameters as theology. Religious Zionism does contain deep theological roots but is in itself not a theological movement.

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