DISRAELI AND RELIGION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a new understanding of Benjamin Disraeli's religious thought. Historians remember Disraeli as a mercurial self-fashioner, who adopted various personae throughout his public life. In focusing on his eccentric self-fashioning as a political actor and novelist, many scholars have removed Disraeli from his nineteenth-century intellectual contexts in their analyses of his ideology. No full-length study of Disraeli's religious position yet exists; instead, writers have subsumed his ideas about Judaism into analyses of his strategic presentation of Jewishness, and dismissed his Christian religious practice as politically expedient.

This study takes a different approach. Rather than asking whether Disraeli can be considered a Christian or a Jew, it examines the complicated religious ideas that emerge from his body of written work, and especially from his novels. Disraeli's Judeo-Christian theism was panoramically and imaginatively conceived, and therefore less invested in complex Victorian ecclesiastical politics than the religious beliefs of some of his parliamentary contemporaries. Nevertheless, his publicly-expressed ideas about faith can be comfortably situated within the dynamic religious atmosphere of nineteenth-century Britain. The main arguments are offered in Chapters 2-5, which consider salient religious themes in Disraeli's work: his inflection of the Bible in his early novels, his figurative notion of Zionism, his religious conception of chosenness, his interest in 'Neology' and biblical criticism, the religious assumptions that undergird his language of race, and his view of England's soil and constitution as sacred. Chapter 1 provides important contexts for these discussions by outlining the manner in which Disraeli's work intervened in the religious debates of his time.

Placing Disraeli's religious ideas in these contexts not only fills an important gap in Disraeli scholarship; it also addresses methodological issues in writing religious history. Twentieth-century histories focused on Disraeli's Romanticism, orientalism, racial otherness, and political ideology at the expense of his engagement with the religious testimonies and traditions of his time. This thesis therefore offers an important corrective to both Disraeli studies and Victorian historical scholarship.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BDL	Weibe, M.G., et al. (eds.), *Benjamin Disraeli Letters* (10 vols., Toronto, 1989-2014).
GD	Foot, M.R.D., and H.C.G. Matthew, *The Gladstone Diaries* (14 vols., Oxford, 1968-1994).
HL	The Library at Hughenden Manor, National Trust
Hughenden MSS.	The Hughenden Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford
M&B	Monypenny, W.F. and Buckle, G.E., *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* (6 vols., London, 1910).
ODNB	*The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004-2016).
PH	*Parliamentary History*
RAL	The Rothschild Archive, London

INTRODUCTION

This thesis on Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81), novelist, politician, and twice prime minister, begins with a subject that would have infuriated him: Gladstone. In *Gladstone: God and Politics* (2007), Richard Shannon decided that the relationship between Gladstone's religious intensity and political ideology needed significant attention. Shannon would allow the statesman himself to be 'the best provider of this'; he would 'attend to what Gladstone said about himself, and accept that he meant what he said'.[1] This resulted in a nuanced illustration of the connection between Gladstone's piety and political pragmatism.

A similar exercise has never been applied to Disraeli's religious thought for a number of reasons. Did Disraeli care about religion at all? Most of his historians think not; indeed, many of them blatantly mock his religious expressions. In response to Disraeli's statement that he must 'ever cling' to the Church of England 'as the visible means which embalms the memory of my race, their deeds and thoughts, and connects their blood with the origin of things', the scholar Todd Endelman bemusedly remarked, 'Hardly a stirring confession of faith!'[2] Further, can we believe anything that Disraeli said about himself? Again, historians have been remiss to take Disraeli at his word. As one particularly cynical writer recently put it, 'Disraeli hides everything important'.[3] The Roman Catholic newspaper *The Nation* remarked on the occasion of Disraeli's death that, 'Priest or parson, book or prayer, cross or crescent, symbol or sign of faith, there was nothing to tell whether the dying man thought of Moses, or Mahomet, or Christ'.[4] His early biographer W.F. Monypenny claimed that, 'an absolute reticence as to his personal religion was one of Beaconsfield's marked characteristics'.[5] It seems that applying Shannon's methodology – which relied upon his

[1] Richard Shannon, *Gladstone: God and Politics* (London, 2007), p. xii.
[2] Todd Endelman, 'A Hebrew to the end': the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness', in Charles Richmond and Paul Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 127.
[3] David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (New Haven, 2016), p. 14.
[4] Qtd. in Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli: A Biography* (London, 1993), p. 659.
[5] John Vincent, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 1990), p. 38.

subject's religious intensity and sincerity of self-expression – to Disraeli, the infamously unprincipled political ascender, would prove impossible. However, I think that it *is* possible, and in this dissertation I set out to do it.

What follows is an intellectual recovery of Benjamin Disraeli's religious thought. In keeping with the example of Shannon's methodology, it begins with the premise that we must take seriously Disraeli's statements about his beliefs, which, in Disraeli studies, amounts to a methodological revolution. The memorable aphorisms scattered throughout his novels – 'Sensible men are all of the same religion . . . Sensible men never tell' – and his reputation as the flamboyant dandy who schemed his way into the upper echelons of British politics have contributed to a dominant illustration of Disraeli as an enigmatic opportunist who lacked genuine convictions.[6] As we shall see, in nearly every scholarly volume published on Disraeli in the last century, one finds reference to his duplicity and eccentricity: as the biographer Robert Blake put it, 'It is the enigma and fascination of Disraeli's personality that we can never be sure. Pose and sincerity are inextricably interwoven . . . even the sincerest sentiments take on an air of the stage when Disraeli utters them'.[7]

As recently as 2013 Robert O'Kell put this enigma at the centre of a scrutiny into Disraeli's psychological fantasies.[8] And in his monograph, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (2016), the late David Cesarani argued that Disraeli's lack of principle explained the haughty racial ideology he adopted at the expense of the Jews he claimed to champion. This 'smoke and mirrors' interpretation of Disraeli, as a self-fashioner who calculatingly adopted various different personae in the course of his public life, has precluded any serious attention to his religious thought, or his philosophical ideas in general. Jonathan Parry described this phenomenon aptly when he claimed that "historians seem to feel obliged to place a sly construction on all [Disraeli's] operations, for fear of being branded naïve'.[9]

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[6] Disraeli, *Endymion* (London, 1880), p. x.
[7] Robert Blake, *Disraeli: A Biography* (London, 1966), pp. 65-6.
[8] See Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), pp. 3-8.
[9] J.P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), p. 700.

Benjamin Disraeli was born in London to Jewish parents, Isaac and Maria D'Israeli, on 21 December 1804. In his early schooling in Islington, he received separate Hebrew lessons with another Jewish boy in the class, which suggests that he was being prepared for bar-mitzvah at age thirteen. However, after Isaac D'Israeli had a dispute with the Bevis Marks Synagogue over his refusal to take up the role of 'parnass', or warden, in October 1813, Isaac decided to withdraw his membership from the synagogue and to baptise his children in the Church of England. His decision was influenced by his friend, the Christian historian and author Sharon Turner (1768-1847), who subsequently acted as godfather for Benjamin. Disraeli was thus baptised at St Andrew's in Holborn on 31 July 1813 and thereafter he attended a different school in Epping Forest, run by the Unitarian minister Eli Cogan (whose Anglicized Jewish name suggests he might have been a convert himself).[10] In his adolescence and early adulthood, Disraeli became known for his dandyish and ornate way of dressing, his enchantment with the aristocracy, and his 'silver-fork' society novels. His reputation as a literary figure and man about town grew in concurrence with his financial debt, which he acquired through bad speculations on the stock market. In the 1820s he was wrapped up with a failed attempt to start a publication called *The Representative* with John Murray, an episode which supposedly established his reputation for scandal.

In the 1830-1 Disraeli toured Spain, Gibraltar, Malta, Albania, Turkey, Israel, and Egypt, countries that represented to him a lost world of Eastern splendour and religious mysticism. The Eastern tour has been described by most scholars as emblematic of Disraeli's Byronic Romanticism and his search for his identity and power. Robert O'Kell, for example, claimed that the 'self-pitying and heroic terms' in which Disraeli embarked on his travels 'suggest that he consciously saw himself as fated, like Childe Harold and his creator, to undergo a melodramatic exile'. However, the fiction that came out of the trip suggests that Disraeli was more interested in religious notions of exile, and specifically, on the well-known

[10] For accounts of Disraeli's early life, education, and baptism, see David Cesarani, *Disraeli*, pp. 21-6; Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), pp. 3-8; Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli*, pp. xi- xiv, pp. 17-33; Robert Blake, *Disraeli*, pp. 3-20.

narratives of exile in the Hebrew Bible. On his return he wrote two novels, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833) and *The Rise of Iskander* (1833), each of which featured a Messianic hero who seeks to liberate his people from captivity and religious subordination, in order to restore a promised nation.

Such were the literary and conceptual interests of the same Disraeli who, after several failed attempts, entered parliament in 1837 as MP for Maidstone. His subsequent rise within the Tory Protectionist party, and his leadership within the idealistic Young England group is well known and has been documented in scores of biographies and histories. Less known is that this political Disraeli remained consistent with the young Disraeli who had studied the Old Testament concepts of glory, kingship, and nationhood. In his political career and novels, he called for a united and faithful nation, bound by the laws of Scripture and providence, and guided by a strong, religiously and morally inspired leader reminiscent of chosen kings of the Hebrew Bible.

This reading of Disraeli's religious and political thought remains entirely unexpressed in secondary literature. A burst of recent attention has cast light on his fiction as a source for his ideological formation, as well as his pride in his Jewishness which scholars now regard as a strategic identity that he fashioned in order to assert his own kind of superior pedigree. This biographical emphasis on his mercurial personality has caused scholars to remove Disraeli from his nineteenth-century intellectual contexts in their studies of his identity and thought. When placed back into the framework of Victorian intellectual and religious history, Disraeli's statements about religion take on a different meaning. Rather than playful aphorisms, they become ambitious contributions to the ideological battles that characterized the century: between the truth of Scripture and the skepticism of progressive material science, between the landed aristocracy and the restless working masses, and between an established Church, clinging to its exclusive status, and a polity that seemed to have fragmented into a multitude of religious affiliations. Through a careful and theologically-attuned analysis of his letters, speeches, and especially his novels, we can begin to construct the religious framework in which he operated and to discern how his religious assumptions shaped his political and social

thought. This study therefore fundamentally challenges the claim of one of Disraeli's most famous biographers, Robert Blake, who maintained that 'it is probably hopeless to extract a coherent body of doctrine from [Disraeli's] observations on religion. He believed different things at different times and failed to see their inconsistency'.[11]

The following chapters demonstrate the theological ignorance that underpinned such a dismissal of Disraeli's religious thought. In fact, Victorian religion itself was extremely messy, and in rewriting biblical tropes, inflecting notionally 'conventional' theological assumptions, and upholding seemingly incompatible religious beliefs, Disraeli participated in a religious culture utterly in flux. The point of this inquiry is not to emphasize Disraeli's piety or to rehabilitate his reputation from accusations of expediency; but rather, to nuance the way in which we understand his engagement with the religious paradigms of his time. It would be senseless to deny that Disraeli was a shrewd political operator and a pragmatist; but it is important to emphasize that all of his political manoeuvering occurred within a paradigm and in an ideological system that took religion seriously. Not everything that Disraeli said or did can be explained by his religious ideas; but he spoke and acted in an intellectual environment which remained extremely invested in religious truth – an environment in which Disraeli actively participated and to which he publicly contributed for over forty years.

His fiction and non-fiction demonstrate that Disraeli's Judeo-Christian theism was panoramically and imaginatively conceived, and therefore less invested in the particularities of Victorian ecclesiastical politics than were the religious beliefs of some of his parliamentary counterparts. Nevertheless, Disraeli's unexplored statements about religion can be comfortably situated within the religious atmosphere of nineteenth-century Britain: in particular, the changing nature of Judeo-Christian belief and practice, the inherent religiosity of the Romantic artistic and literary movement, the nostalgia for medieval theological purity that informed the Oxford Movement and Neo-Gothicism, the evolving conception of providence that shaped the historical discipline and the political sphere, the burgeoning language of 'race'

[11] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 503.

that was used to describe peoples and nations, and the threat of unbelief as scientific materialism found an increasingly central place in intellectual culture.

I.

Methodology

This study is not an exhaustive survey of Disraeli's political career, nor does it seek to explain his ecclesiastical politics and parliamentary movements; as we shall see, such inquiries have been undertaken before. Rather, it is an intellectual history of Disraeli's religious ideas. In approaching his religious ideas, I have been influenced by three main critical approaches.

The first was set out very simply by Maurice Cowling in *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (1980): 'It is from religion that modern intellectual history should begin'.[12] Cowling intervened in decades of scholarship that had begun to consider England as a post-Christian, secular nation. He insisted that the public intellect remained committed to religion, and that all public figures 'have had a doctrine, whether they have known it or not'. Further, all public figures have been motivated not merely by the secular forces of politics, art, science, philosophy, and literature, but by the questions, 'what should the English believe? should they believe in Christianity? What role should religion play in the public realm?'[13] These very questions acted centrally in Disraeli's public project, and he considered himself uniquely equipped to answer them. As he expressed in his novel *Coningsby* (1844), 'The Spirit of the Age is the very thing a great man changes'.[14] It will become clear that, in the tradition of Old Testament kingship, Disraeli felt himself called to shape public doctrine.

Cowling also emphasized that 'religion includes not only belief and liturgy but also a structure of public action'.[15] In other words, public action that did not express itself in explicitly religious terms nevertheless asserted some kind of religious vision or doctrine. This idea has found new expression in the recent discourse on 'lived religion'. Specifically, David D. Hall's *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (1997) set out to redefine academic approaches to the study of religion, and specifically to contest the 'almost irresistible

[12] Maurice Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine in Modern England* (Cambridge, 1980), p. xii.
[13] *Ibid*., pp. xii-xiii.
[14] Benjamin Disraeli, *Coningsby, or, The new generation*, ed. Shiela M. Smith (Oxford, 1982), p. 104.
[15] Cowling, *Religion and Public Doctrine*, p. xiii.

impulse toward at least a casual functionalism in the way most people think about religion'.[16] Over the past century of historical writing about Disraeli, when historians have acknowledged Disraeli's religious ideas at all, they have viewed them as strategies that he knowingly formulated in order to ascend the political ladder. This interpretation assumes that religious belief functions as epiphenomenal to personal psychology; that religious ideas are detached and as malleable enough to be 'fashioned' for personal expediency. Arthur Frietzsche, who wrote a volume on Disraeli's religion in the 1960s, provides a clear-cut example of this hypothesis. Addressing Disraeli's attitude towards Roman Catholicism in *Sybil*, Frietzsche claimed:

> Religion is not a topic for discussion [in the novel *Sybil*], but it is considered as an aspect of the hero's emotionalism . . . Clearly the problem of religion and doubt had made no impression as yet upon the author. Disraeli was avowedly attracted by the surface glitter of Roman Catholic practice, but he had neither knowledge nor interest in the theology and belief which lay behind it.[17]

Frietzsche's represents one of many constructions of Disraeli in which his religious thought remained categorically distinct from his political, national, and personal ideologies. This is simply a misleading separation; religion, especially in Disraeli's time, did not operate as an isolated ideology. It had informed and penetrated public discourse for centuries; it acted paradigmatically and arguably even unconsciously. As Hall points out in *Lived Religion*, 'religion is not *in* or *of* the world, nor simply *against* but *through* the world'.[18] To suggest that religious investments function in the same manner as other intellectual affinities is to reduce religion to a set of suppositional doctrines and to overlook that, as Cowling suggested, religious beliefs and devotion shape the very basis on which one approaches and interprets existence and public practice. Indeed, religious and existential ides shape the manner in which one lives and practices public doctrine, rather than the other way around.

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[16] David D. Hall (ed.), *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton, 1997), p. x.
[17] Arthur H. Frietzsche, *Disraeli's Religion: The Treatment of Religion in Disraeli's Novels* (Utah, 1961), p. 30.
[18] Hall (ed.), *Lived Religion*, p. x.

The historian David Bebbington has offered a strong articulation of this 'lived religion' approach as it might apply to the study of modern religious revivals. He argues that since E.P. Thompson's Marxist reading of English social history in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), historians have presented religion as a form of social control, developing what he calls the 'religion and society' model which viewed religious revivals such as Methodism as the secondary functions of other social and economic circumstances.[19] This framework 'disallowed the consideration of *ideas* and *piety*'; as became the case for Disraeli, too often political historians with secular horizons analysed his political motives at the expense of the ideological and religious dimensions of his thought.[20] Thus Bebbington's call for a shift towards 'culture and piety' as a way of approaching historical religious belief can be used to approach a better understanding of Disraeli's religious thought.

Using Bebbington's definition of 'piety' as 'the devotional expression of lived religion', we can begin to take seriously the complex way through which Disraeli expressed his religious ideas. The question of, as historian John Vincent put it, 'Disraeli: Christian or Jew?' has impeded a nuanced consideration of Disraeli's religious thought by confining the inquiry to this unhelpful doctrinal binary. As we shall see, in recent years historians have shown a renewed interest in Disraeli's Jewishness: new studies have explored Disraeli's 'Jewish concerns';[21] his 'imagination and Jewish fantasies';[22] the way he 'exult[ed] in his Jewishness;'[23] and 'the need both to deny and affirm his Jewishness'.[24] This work has overwhelmingly regarded Disraeli's Jewishness not as a religious investment, but as an ethnic identity which he deliberately fashioned for his own gain. Moreover, by focusing on whether or not he can be considered a Jew or a Christian, scholars have ignored the crucial fact that Disraeli himself

[19] David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture & Piety* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 28-30.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 36.
[21] Todd M. Endelman, 'Benjamin Disraeli and the Myth of Sephardi Superiority', *Jewish History* 10:2 (1996), p. 22.
[22] Endelman and Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 5.
[23] Geoffrey Harvey (ed.), *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (in *The early novels of Benjamin Disraeli*, 6 vols, London, 2004), iv, p. viii.
[24] Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), p. 68.

did not doctrinally differentiate along a Christian/Jewish binary. He reiterated over and over again in his novels that the two creeds formed two parts of the same overall truth.

Rather than fixating on the legitimacy or validity of his statements about Jewish and Christian theology, or the degree to which they conformed to what we might think of as conventional religious ideas, this thesis focuses on the many ways in which Disraeli expressed a lived piety. These include his attraction to literary and artistic Romanticism, his novel writing, his interest in the idea of 'race', and his political distaste for liberalism and progress. The 'lived religion' and 'culture and piety' models presented by Cowling, Hall, and Bebbington allow us to explore the manner in which religious ideas permeated each of these categories of Disraeli's thought and expression. As Disraeli himself expressing in *Coningsby*, 'Religion should be a faith and not a form'.[25]

[25] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p.156.

II.

Sources

Disraeli stated about his fiction that 'My books are the history of my life . . . I don't mean the vulgar photographs of incidents, but the psychological development of my character. Self-inspiration may be egotistical,' he wrote, 'but it is generally true'.[26] This thesis takes Disraeli at his word. Where the majority of his biographers, historians, and most recently, literary critics, have viewed Disraeli's novels as repositories for his uncontrolled psychological expressions, or for his calculated political and social agendas, this thesis interprets Disraeli's fiction as an expression of his ideological interests as they developed over time. Moreover, it foregrounds the fiction as its main source precisely because it was public, published material. This demonstrates that Disraeli's religious ideas did not comprise some recondite interest which he kept close to his chest. On the contrary, he clearly and publicly communicated his notions of personal faith, providence, biblical narratives, and religious nationhood. Contemporaneous reviews suggest that many of his nineteenth-century readers noticed these themes operating centrally in his books. This renders it plain that subsequent biographies and histories neglected the theological ideas within Disraeli's fiction because they wrote within a secular framework that no longer prioritized religious devotion as a motivating factor in fictional texts.

Chapter 2 ('Scripture') seeks to address this historiographical pitfall through a discussion of the significant religious and theological dimensions within the literary culture in which Disraeli wrote. For now, it becomes important to clarify the manner in which this thesis understands Disraeli's fiction operating as a serious venue for his religious views. A number of approaches have helped to frame fiction as a reliable source for understanding the ideological and religious motivations of its author. As early as 1953, John Holloway's *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* offered a new interpretation of the nineteenth-century novel and novelist. Holloway claimed that the typical rules of rhetoric could not be applied to

[26] Qtd. in Schwarz, 'Self-Fashioning in the Novels', in *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli,* p. 57.

many Victorian writers because their texts were not merely stories. Rather, they represented articulations of moral and philosophical positions, with the nineteenth-century novelist assuming the role of prophet more than narrator. Accordingly, Holloway argued that

> the novelist is every bit as well equipped as the discursive essayist to mediate a view of life . . . The writings of Newman, Carlyle and Arnold himself abound with real or invented examples that illustrate and indeed largely replace general propositions. All that happens when we turn to the novel is that we find illustrative incidents in a story instead of illustrative examples in an argument.[27]

This becomes a useful way of interpreting the political, moral, and religious projects within Disraeli's fiction. Indeed, in what follows this thesis draws significant comparisons between Disraeli and Newman, Carlyle, and Arnold. Instead of a rather crude understanding of, in Robert Blake's words, 'fiction with a propagandist purpose', or the 'novel-with-a-message', it becomes more accurate, considering the moral and religious environment in which Disraeli wrote in the 1830s and 1840s especially, to consider his novels as enunciations and petitions for religious, political, and ethical renewal in the face of the 'condition of England' question.[28]

It is also important to consider Disraeli as an active participant in the Romantic literary and artistic movement, which emphasized mystical, transcendental, and imaginative experiences in order to counteract the functionalism and empiricism that seemed to dominate the post-Enlightenment intellectual space. As we shall see, a significant body of recent literature has convincingly illuminated the religious themes that undergirded most Romantic poetry and prose that was written within the 'cult of the sublime'. Gauri Viswanathan has contributed an interesting dimension to this literature in her recent article, 'Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy' (2008), which offers a new understanding of seemingly secular literature written in the imaginative genre. Viswanathan disrupts the reductive interpretation of secularization 'in terms of ruptures between two worldviews, one religious and the other rational and modern'.[29] She contests the centrality of secularism to literature

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[27] John Holloway, *The Victorian Sage: Studies in Argument* (London, 1953), p. 12.
[28] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 192.
[29] Gauri Viswanathan, 'Secularism in the Framework of Heterodoxy', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 123:2 (2008), pp. 466-7.

itself, claiming that too often secularism is treated as 'the inaugural moment of literature's formation, a defining aspect of its identity, whose religious traces are no more than a historical reminder of a displaced worldview'.[30] Instead, Viswanathan suggests that in the increasing secularization of western literature,

> the primary ruptures are not between reason and religion, but rather, between belief and imagination, pointing to a development in which religious belief is contested by the alternative (even heterodox) knowledge systems it had suppressed or marginalized. This transition from belief to imagination was jagged, not smooth, mediated by occult movements.[31]

This thesis views Disraeli's fiction as a part of the transition that Viswanathan describes, not from the religious to the secular, but from the religious to the heterodox. This approach accords with the 'lived religion' and 'culture and piety' models articulated by Cowling, Bebbington, and Hall; it rejects the dichotomy between 'sacred' and 'secular' by emphasizing the manner in which the secular remains in active dialogue with religious ideas, especially as those ideas are transformed to the extent that they were over the course of the Victorian period.

The following chapters thus draw on Disraeli's fiction as a main source in analysing his religious ideas. They also consider his non-fiction and political rhetoric, largely in order to demonstrate the consistency with which Disraeli expressed himself in different genres. They draw on his collection of correspondence, which has been annotated by the University of Toronto Press in the *Benjamin Disraeli Letters*. These volumes cover the period of Disraeli's correspondence up until the year 1868. In my research of the years between 1868 and 1881, I benefitted from the enormous collection Disraeli's papers, letters, and manuscripts held by the Bodleian Library under the title 'Hughenden Papers'. This thesis regards Disraeli's personal papers as secondary to his fiction, however, in its exploration of his religious ideas, precisely because it is interested in that which he expressed in the public sphere, by way of Cowling's idea of 'public doctrine'. In adopting the 'lived religion' method, it places emphasis

[30] *Ibid*., p. 467.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 468.

not on the traditional idea of 'confessional' letters or diaries, but on the manner in which Disraeli publicly articulated his religious ideas.

In exploring the contexts within which Disraeli developed the religious ideas in his novels, I have also consulted the remains of Disraeli's library at Hughenden Manor. The National Trust estimates that the existing library at Hughenden represents about twenty per cent of Disraeli's full library; the remainder was sold to pay off debts after his death. This renders it the more interesting that the library contains a huge amount of religious and theological material. In many of these volumes, Disraeli placed his own bookplate beside that of Isaac D'Israeli, from whom he inherited many of his books. This small gesture attests to the intention and ownership which Disraeli felt towards this collection. In what follows, we will see the manner in which his own writing related to, and established a dialogue with, many of the works of biblical criticism and theology that he had in his possession at Hughenden.

III.

The 'woolly, Oriental philosophy': Disraeli's religious thought in the twentieth century[32]

Historians have sustained three broad approaches to his religious ideas since Disraeli's death in 1881. Contemporaneous biographers, writing shortly after his death, represented Disraeli as a nineteenth-century thinker who invested himself in the religious debacles that formed the major intellectual questions of his period, and that comprised a significant portion of his concerns while in parliament. Historians such as J.A. Froude, Charles Alexander Ewald, and T.E. Kebbel took Disraeli's ideas about religion seriously and situated his thought within the theological and ecclesiastical controversies of his lifetime: the Oxford Movement in the 1830s and 1840s, the anxiety about Roman Catholic power surrounding the 'Papal Aggression' of 1851, the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, and the debates surrounding the disestablishment of the Irish Church in the later 1860s. These nineteenth-century biographers become invaluable sources in a revised analysis of Disraeli's religious thought because they demonstrate that within the Victorian mind, his political pragmatism and his colourful 'self-fashioning', did not preclude his religious ideas and investments. Chapter 1 ('Reinterpretation') of the thesis therefore considers Disraeli's contemporaneous biographers as vital primary sources. The next section of this Introduction will consider the final approach, which comprised an interest in Disraeli's Jewishness as an ethnic identity, in keeping with the priorities of cultural studies.

The present section focuses on the second approach: the shift in historiography which led to a secularized construction of Disraeli in the twentieth-century. From the period that Monypenny and Buckle produced their five-volume biography, between 1910 and 1920, historical writing downplayed or ignored Disraeli's religious ideas, and almost altogether

[32] Disraeli, *Blake*, p. 59.

removed him from discussions of nineteenth-century religion.[33] The histories of Robert Blake, Morris Edmund Speare, Arthur H. Frietzsche, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Smith portrayed Disraeli as a shrewd and cynical political actor who lacked the earnestness required for simple piety, let alone complex theological opinions. This lack of interest in Disraeli's religion reflected mid-twentieth century historical priorities; as Simon Skinner has put it: 'For much of the twentieth century, writing in a determinedly secular intellectual culture, political historians habitually imposed the transcendent categories of their own epoch – the social and economic – onto a nineteenth-century politics whose language much more often articulated religious or constitutional concerns, and often simultaneously both'.[34]

Instead of interpreting Disraeli's religious ideas as fundamental to his intellectual position throughout his life, as did his contemporaneous biographers, twentieth-century writers generally made two assumptions about Disraeli's religious thought: they either ignored the idea of Disraeli as a religious thinker, or focused on his Jewish background as an exotic racial characteristic that shaped Disraeli's eccentric persona. For example, Robert Blake and Paul Smith each represented Disraeli's affinity for his Jewish heritage as nothing more than a strange, undefined interest in the Orient, and his Christianity as merely a political and social necessity. Others, such as Hannah Arendt, highlighted the fraudulent nature of Disraeli's Jewish expression, claiming that he had no understanding of rabbinic Judaism, and no religious principle whatsoever. The rare mentions of Disraeli's religion in these works remained firmly suppressed within the problematic 'religion and society' model described by Bebbington: his religious ideas were represented as a species of his political ideology and aims. As his religious thought was secularized, the notion that 'Disraeli thought of Judaism in terms of race, of aristocratic or superior race, rather than in terms of religion' – would become the predominant understanding of Disraeli's Jewishness throughout the

[33] For the best discussion of the twentieth-century muffling of Disraeli's Jewishness, see Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London, 2002), p. 9.
[34] Simon Skinner, 'Religion', in David Craig and James Thompson (eds.), *Languages of Politics in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2013), p. 93.

twentieth century, eclipsing both any consideration of his religious understanding of Judaism or of his Christian thought and practice.[35]

This secularization of Disraeli's religious thought fit comfortably within the narrative of Disraeli as an unlikely Jewish success story, and as one who would have to sacrifice all principles to gain the power he sought. In constructing this narrative, historians attributed Disraeli's interests in Judaism and Christianity to his desire to fashion himself as a special eccentric in order to succeed in the social and political spheres. Such was the case in the only monograph that has ever attempted to tackle the subject of Disraeli and religion, Arthur Frietzsche's *Disraeli's Religion: The Treatment of Religion in Disraeli's Novels* (1961). Frietzsche overpromised in his title. In fact, he portrayed Disraeli's interest in Judaism as a race and identity – a 'solid core of Jewish thought and an amorphous pro-Jewish feeling' – but made hardly any mention of Disraeli's articulation of religious ideas.[36] For Frietzsche Disraeli 'was a Jew of an imagined racial aristocracy, not a Jew of the *Torah*' because he 'show[ed] little knowledge of, or interest in, Jewish ritual or practice'.[37] Frietzsche's work stands as a salient example of the need for the 'lived religion' approach to nineteenth-century religious practice. Because Disraeli was 'not a Jew of the *Torah*', his copious statements about Judaism were attributed to something else altogether: to a secularized notion of 'race', which would allow him to assert a pedigree of his own.

Another work which purported to address Disraeli's religious thought, Clyde J. Lewis' article, 'Disraeli's Conception of Divine Order' (1962) similarly treated Disraeli's existential ideology as entirely separate from Judaism or Christianity. Lewis argued that underneath Disraeli's 'whole ideological superstructure was a theory of supernatural purpose' and that his 'conception of this Divine order was the unifying idea in his whole philosophy'.[38] But he suggested that this theism had nothing to do with Judaism, for '[Disraeli] was almost

[35] Arthur H. Frietzsche, *Disraeli's Religion: the treatment of religion in Disraeli's novels* (Utah, 1961), p. 15.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 9.
[37] *Ibid*., p. 16.
[38] Clyde J. Lewis, 'Disraeli's Conception of Divine Order', *Jewish Social Studies*, 24 (1962), p. 144.

completely ignorant of Hebraic dogma and ritual'.[39] Even if Disraeli, from his youth, 'entertained the idea that God had endowed Palestine with a mysterious blessing which was also shared by its inhabitants', Lewis maintained that this was an expression of Disraeli's racial chauvinism, rather than evidence of a Jewish understanding of God or nationhood. The degree to which the article entirely separated Disraeli's belief in a divine order from the religious traditions which Disraeli openly referenced was almost bizarre. In Lewis' words, Disraeli 'wove the idea of Jewish superiority into his theory that human history was the expression of Divine purpose'.[40] This was a strange way of avoiding the entirety of the Jewish tradition itself, which itself holds that God chose the Jews of Israel as His people. Instead, Lewis presented Jewish racial superiority and divine order as two totally different concepts. Claims of this variety indicate the extent to which mid-twentieth-century historians imagined the nineteenth century as an arena of ideological experimentation in which religious ideas were traded and manipulated like goods.

This strand of mid-twentieth-century historiography – which viewed Disraeli's Jewishness not as a religion, but as an interesting character trait and a racial identity and enthusiasm – was lent sociological and ideological gravitas by Hannah Arendt's post-Holocaust analysis of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Arendt argued that Disraeli's role-playing had more sinister results than his own expedient rise to political fame: his Jewish conceit had transformed into that 'very real Jewish chauvinism' which would be 'so decisive for the psychology of modern Jews'. In her analysis of the rise of anti-Semitism and its interrelation with fascism throughout the nineteenth century, Arendt labelled Disraeli 'The Potent Wizard' who 'played the game of politics like an actor in a theatrical performance, except that he played his part so well that he was convinced by his own make-believe'.[41] Like Speare, Frietzshe, and Lewis, in Arendt's scenario, Disraeli had 'an admiration for all things Jewish that was matched only by his ignorance of them'. It was this division between Jewish

[39] *Ibid*., p. 153.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 155.
[41] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1968), pp. 74, 68.

racial identity and the Jewish religion that, for Arendt, produced dark results: Disraeli's simultaneous ignorance and pride in his Judaism, 'almost automatically produced the entire set of theories about Jewish influence and organization that we usually find in the more vicious forms of antisemitism'. Arendt's illustration of Disraeli's Judaism – as self-constructed, self-serving, unconnected to Jewish theology, and unwittingly destructive to Jews throughout Europe – precipitated the stripping of Disraeli's Judaism from twentieth-century accounts and perpetuated the notion that religion had nothing to do with Disraeli's ideology.

In the 1960s, the perception of Disraeli as a sophisticated partaker of eastern delights, as one who had a nebulous, bizarre, but ultimately harmless aesthetic affinity to all things Jewish and Oriental, gained new ground.[42] Robert Blake and Paul Smith interpreted Disraeli's novels as elaborate satires, rather than political and religious pleas to the nation. Those works that dealt specifically with theological themes of Jewish restoration, such as *Alroy* (1833) and *Tancred* (1847), were seen to exhibit Disraeli's fluffy eastern interests, rather than an uncomfortable proto-racialist championship of the Jews which would sit dangerously in the decades before the Holocaust. When Blake introduced *Contarini Fleming* (1832), *Alroy* (1833), *Tancred* (1847), and *Lothair* (1870) in his biography, for example, he referred to 'the somewhat bizarre, and, if the truth be admitted, woolly, Oriental philosophy which he professed from time to time – "the great Asian mystery"'.[43]

His vague notion of Disraeli's 'Oriental philosophy' found further expression when Blake revisited the subject of Disraeli's eastern tour in *Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-31*, sixteen years after his 1966 biography. While he claimed that 'I had not perhaps done [Disraeli's stay in Jerusalem] full justice in my biography', Blake's 'new' portrait of Disraeli in the Middle East was thoroughly recognizable as the Disraeli he had constructed in 1966: a delightfully eccentric aristocrat, whose exoticism was gentrified and muted until it was altogether unthreatening, both to Disraeli's contemporaries and to Blake and his

[42] See Daniel Schwarz in *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 16; he 'situates Disraeli's "Jewish" novels firmly in the context of romanticism and the history of nineteenth-century taste'.
[43] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 59.

contemporaries in the 1960s. The blurb on the back cover of the book was an extract from one of Disraeli's letters:

> To repose on voluptuous ottomans and smoke superb pipes, daily to indulge in the luxury of a bath which required half a dozen attendants for its perfection; to court the air in a carved caique, by shores which are a perpetual scene; this is, I think, a far more sensible life than all the bustle of clubs, all the boring of drawing rooms.[44]

Here was the pure, Blake-ian Disraeli: a rarefied wit who adventurously indulged in the luxuries of the east to escape the occasional boredom of the Carlton Club.

Philip Guedalla illustrated his Bradenham edition of *Tancred* with the same conception of Disraeli; he remarked that 'Disraeli's Orientalism' superseded any earnest spiritual concerns in the plot of *Tancred*:

> But the real figures seem to fade, as the novelist propels his hero towards the East – his darling East, still rich with travel memories of 1831 . . . The mutter of bazaars sounds in his ears again with the low whisper of divans. The East goes by; and a delighted pen traces its long, luxuriant names like incantations . . . The spiritual objects of the New Crusade seem almost to be forgotten in the delights of local colour . . . Indeed, the main interest of the book lies in the quality of Disraeli's Orientalism.[45]

These two interpretation of Disraeli's religious thought – as an expedient racial identity, or as an affinity for the sensual allure of the East and its luxuries – combined completely to eclipse the prominence of biblical material in Disraeli's novels. In his discussion of *Tancred* (1847), Paul Smith sardonically claimed that the novel did nothing more than give 'Disraeli the chance to use up the Palestine material and indulge his taste for eastern exoticism' before concluding that the '"great Asian mystery" became a standing object of ridicule to those who could see nothing in *Tancred* but the great Disraelian mystification'.[46] Indeed, perhaps most telling about the degree to which Disraeli's Judaism was deemed something entirely different and unthreatening – this 'Disraelian mystification' – is the fact that Disraeli's 'Jewish' novels were altogether excluded from scholarly discussions of Anglo-Jewish fiction. In *The*

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[44] Robert Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour*, *Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-1* (New York, 1982), pp. xvi, 7, 74.
[45] Philip Guedalla, 'Introduction', in Benjamin Disraeli, *Tancred* (London, 1927), pp. vi-vii.
[46] Paul Smith, *Disraeli, A Brief Life* (New York, 1996), pp. 88, 89.

Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Jewish Novel (1981), Linda Gertner Zatlin 'relentlessly summarized . . . thirty odd novels (plus some short fiction) of Anglo-Jewish writers who were born in the nineteenth century of a Jewish mother and who started publishing prior to 1900' but she entirely excluded 'apostates like Benjamin Disraeli'.[47] This view allowed Disraeli to slip through the cracks of the historiography, between serious nineteenth-century Christian thinkers and Jewish writers.

Though the mystification, blurring, and muting of Disraeli's religious thought – and particularly his Judaism – dominated most twentieth-century historiography, the 1980s saw a surge of cultural studies around Jewish nationhood and identity in the post-war period. Out of this scholarship came a pivotal essay about Disraeli's Judaism which deserves rehabilitation. Rolf P. Lessenich's 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England: The Jewish Contribution to British Civilization in Benjamin Disraeli's Trilogy' (1987) appeared in a collected volume based on an English-German symposium that focused on literary representations of Jewish suffering in English literature.[48] The introduction to the volume named Disraeli as the writer through whom 'Jews joined the ranks of English authors' and saw *Tancred* as a fundamentally religious novel, which 'dare[d] to recommend the study of Jewish religion as an aid to the renewal of the Christian faith' as a key moment in Jewish representation within English literature.

In keeping with this understanding of Disraeli as a key agent in the representation of religious Judaism in England, in his essay Lessenich departed from Blake's muffled reading of Disraeli's uncomfortable 'Jewish descent', and of Hannah Arendt's analysis of Disraeli's racialism, and instead looked carefully at the politics of Disraeli's Jewish expression. He showed that Disraeli's reverence for traditional institutions stemmed from Isaac D'Israeli's Enlightenment, anti-Jacobin ideology. Disraeli reacted against Isaac's parting with the Bevis

[47] Max F. Schulz, 'Review of Linda Gertner Zatlin, *The Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Jewish Novel* Review', *The Modern Language Review*, 81:1 (Jan., 1986), pp. 181-2.
[48] Franz Link, 'Introduction' in Link (ed.), *Jewish Life and Suffering as Mirrored in English and American Literature* (Paderborn, 1987).

Marks synagogue and conversion of his children, Lessenich argued, by forming a deeply-held scepticism of the merits of progress:

> The dogmatism that his father repudiated strongly appealed to him. His intensely Christian upbringing in the private boarding schools of Independent and Unitarian ministers strengthened his consciousness of having gone a step beyond his father in the necessary process of assimilation . . . All this conjoined in giving his mind a dogmatic, conservative, and imperialistic slant.[49]

Lessenich was the first scholar to trace this dogmatism in the Young England novels, and to suggest that Disraeli's vociferous traditionalism was rooted in his understanding of Jewish chosenness. He showed that in the Young England trilogy, Disraeli framed the condition of England question within the paradigm of Old Testament retribution. In each novel, Europe has turned its back on the law that was given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Lessenich suggested that Judaic assumptions underlay Disraeli's portrayal of punishment and salvation in the novels: 'The protestant secularization of the monasteries and the social secularization of politics have entailed heathenism and hunger, God has smitten his unfaithful people as of old, and only a return to the law can alleviate the lot of the starting, working people of England'. Where Hannah Arendt argued that Disraeli had abandoned 'the two basic elements of Jewish piety – the Messianic hope and the faith in Israeli's chosenness' – Lessenich saw Disraeli's entire political project as a kind of panoramic religious deliverance: a pursuit of 'the salvation of mankind in a fusion of East and West'.[50] Disraeli's fictional heroes – especially Alroy, Coningsby, Egrement, and Tancred – seek the redemption of Europe not through secular, political means; but literally from the 'Angel of Arabia' on Mount Sinai.[51]

Lessenich's anomalous reading was overshadowed, as we have seen, by the dominant muting of Disraeli's Judaism throughout the twentieth century. In the course of the twentieth century, Disraeli's religious statements were regarded as alternatively insincere and playful;

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[49] Rolf P. Lessenich, 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England: The Jewish Contribution to British Civilization in Benjamin Disraeli's Trilogy' in *Idem*., p. 35.
[50] Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 74.
[51] Lessenich, 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England', pp. 38, 45, 37. See also Disraeli's Chapter 24 in *Lord George Bentinck* (1852), p. 316, in which he explains that he perceives the Roman Catholic church as carrying on the Hebrew tradition.

or more ominously, as demonstrative of the Jewish showmanship that, when mixed with totalitarianism, would lead to devastation. Lessenich's argument – that biblical themes and religious paradigms coloured Disraeli's early ideological development – remains eclipsed by recent readings which have focused on racial politics and identity studies, but delved no further into his religious thought. It is to these interpretations that the next section turns.

IV.

'A bold, if unusual strategy': Disraeli and religion in recent historiography [52]

In most scholarship on Disraeli published in the late 1990s and 2000s, historians have also hesitated to situate him in a conversation about Victorian religious faith. Rather than the consensual secular ideological ground occupied by Blake and others, this scholarship reflects the urgencies of cultural studies, focusing on questions of Disraeli's identity, ethnicity, gender expression, and psychology. Reacting against Blake's portrait of Disraeli as a shrewd political mastermind, recent historians have intentionally switched their focus to deconstructing the complexity of Disraeli's Jewish heritage. Most notably, *Disraeli's Jewishness* (2002), edited by Endelman and Kushner, emphasizes Disraeli's psychological conception of his own racial and cultural identity. Essays in the volume discuss representations of Disraeli's Jewish appearance in Victorian visual culture, his fashioning of himself as an elite Sephardi Jew, his manifold statements about the Jews as a superior race, the anti-Jewish slurs he deflected during political campaigns, and the unlikeliness of a Jew gaining access to elite British political and social society. [53]

But this new appraisal of Disraeli's Jewish identity – his *Jewishness* – makes two assumptions which have led to a problematic portrait of Disraeli's religious ideas. First, this literature crystallizes Blake's view that Disraeli's interest in the Jews was a secular fascination with race. Geoffrey Harvey epitomized this reading of Disraeli's Jewishness in his 2004 edition of *Alroy* (1833); as he put it, 'Disraeli was a Zionist who felt race mattered more than religion'.[54] And secondly, these studies view his interest in the Jewish race purely an expedient act of self-representation: a strategy that he used to ward off potential discrimination and that enabled him to assert his own form of superiority in a hierarchal society. As a result, these histories almost entirely overlook Disraeli's understanding of

[52] Endelman and Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 9.
[53] For the unlikeliness of Disraeli achieving political power, opinions vary. See Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 10. Blake argued that England in the nineteenth century was 'a tolerant place' and that the potential handicap Disraeli suffered as a Jew has been overestimated. Cf. Paul Smith, *Disraeli*, p. 46.
[54] Disraeli, *Alroy,* ed. Geoffrey Harvey, p. xi.

religious *Judaism*, despite his significant body of writings about it and its relationship to Christianity. As Endelman and Kushner have stated, 'the now accepted view of Disraeli's Jewish obsessions – [is] that they constituted a bold, if unusual, strategy to combat his own sense of social inferiority as an outsider in aristocratic Tory circles'.[55] After an outpouring of strong work in this area of racial self-invention, Disraeli's construction of his 'Jewishness' has become less mystifying, and therefore less pressing, than his engagement with Judaism as a set a religious principles.

Further, these recent analyses of Disraeli have had hardly anything to say about his Christian ideas. With the exceptions of Lessenich's article, and Sheila A. Spector's introduction to a digital edition of *Alroy* in 2005, the outpouring of recent attention to Disraeli's Jewishness excludes analysis of the confessional relationship between his Christian and Jewish ideas.[56] This reflects historians' persistent assumptions about Disraeli that Jonathan Parry has identified both in his article 'Disraeli and England' (2000) and in *Disraeli* (2007): that throughout the twentieth century, 'interpretations of Disraeli revolved around two issues: the extent of his sympathy for democracy, and his assumed lack of principle'.[57] This, as Parry has argued, obscured any consideration of the coherence of Disraeli's ideology and the fact that '[h]ardly any Victorian political took more care than Disraeli to work out his ideas'.[58]

Nevertheless, the current state of Disraeli's Jewishness in scholarship can best be understood as a less scathing rehashing of Hannah Arendt's thesis: Disraeli's Jewishness constituted a malleable and useful instrument used for his success and self-fashioning. This narrative was spearheaded by Isaiah Berlin's influential essay 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity' (1968), which itself took influence from Hannah Arendt. But as Todd Endelman has explained in his historiographical review in 'Disraeli's Jewishness

[55] Endelman and Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 9.
[56] See Rolf P. Lessenich, 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England'; cf. Sheila A. Spector (ed.), *Alroy* (*Romantic Circles* http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/alroy/index.html, accessed 26 June 2014).
[57] Jonathan Parry, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 2007), p. 62.
[58] *Idem*., 'Disraeli and England', p. 703.

Reconsidered' (1985), Berlin departed from Arendt in arguing that Disraeli's performance of his Judaism for the sake of social acceptance was an unconscious act of desperation, rather than a calculated strategy.[59]

Endelman's article largely supported Berlin's theory – which itself was a gentler rendering of Arendt's – but he added a consideration of Disraeli's timing. Why, Endelman asked, did Disraeli hide his Judaism in the 1830s (after *Alroy*) but then begin to flaunt it loudly in his fiction in the 1840s and beyond? He rejected Abraham Gilam's suggestion that proto-Zionism could explain this sudden interest in Judaism. To refute Gilam, Endelman posed the question: 'if Disraeli believed that Sinai was incomplete without Calvary (as he frequently stated), how could he also believe that one day the Jews would return to their land to reestablish their own national life, independent of Christianity? We should not regard Disraeli as a Jew, argued Endelman, because 'Christian supersessionism and Jewish nationalism are not easily reconciled'.[60] But he never attempted the counter factual: Disraeli also felt that Calvary was incomplete without Sinai. What Endelman missed, in his quest to disregard Disraeli as a Zionist, is the inextricability between Disraeli's Jewish and Christian thinking. The blending of these theologies, he assumed, meant that Disraeli had no genuine theology at all.

Indeed, Endelman never challenged the assumption within the Arendt/Berlin theory, that Disraeli's Jewishness 'was racial chauvinism and that, except for this, [it] had no other content'.[61] Instead, he substantiated this by reverting to the very common – and erroneous – separation of religion and race. As we shall see in Chapter 4, nineteenth-century racial thought was steeped in religious assumptions: Disraeli joined scores of other racial and religious thinkers in conflating the two categories. The Jews were not special merely by nature

[59] Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas,* ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, 1981), p. 252.
[60] Todd Endelman, 'Disraeli's Jewishness Reconsidered', *Modern Judaism* 5, No. 2 (1985), p. 115.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 116. Endelman repeated this claim almost verbatim in '"A Hebrew to the end": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, pp. 119-20.

of their blood; rather, Disraeli ascribed to the Jews unique spiritual capacities which created their covenant with God and accorded them a special status in providential history.

Endelman's embrace of Arendt's and Berlin's ideas took shape in a major volume published in 1998, *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, edited by Charles Richmond and Paul Smith, and in *Disraeli's Jewishness* (2002), edited by Endelman and Tony Kushner. Each volume referred to Disraeli's Jewishness as a performative, expedient identity, under which lay a genuine belief in Semitic racial superiority coupled with a total ignorance of the Jewish religion. This assumption was substantiated by a few key moments in Disraeli's fiction. In *Tancred* (1847), the sagacious Sidonia tells the young hero: "'All is race; there is no other truth'".[62] This epigram has been lifted out of the context of the novel – in which the Semitic race is superior because according to Holy Scripture, only Jews have directly communed with God and received revealed wisdom – and has instead been used to support the argument that Disraeli's interest in Judaism stemmed from his belief that race was the key to understanding human history. This assumption can be seen as far back as 1927, when Philip Guedalla claimed in his introduction to *Tancred* that 'fortified with this conviction ['All is race: there is no other truth], [Disraeli] derived immense satisfaction from the contemplation of Jewish destinies'.[63] More recently, Patrick Brantlinger cited Sidonia's mantra to illustrate Disraeli's system of racial assertion:

> [Disraeli's] tactic . . . is to assert the precedence of Anglo-Saxons in British history, while also claiming the racial superiority of the Semites, including both Arabs and Jews, over all other races as the founders of the world's greatest religions and empires . . . To foil the anti-semitism he encountered throughout his career, Disraeli asserts a pro-semitism.[64]

[62] See Endelman, 'Disraeli's Jewishness Reconsidered', p. 118, where Endelman cites this passage to support the claim that Disraeli's Jewish obsession was primarily racial chauvinism.
[63] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. vii.
[64] Patrick Brantlinger, 'Empire and nationalism', in Joanne Shattock (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1830-1914* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 261.

Brantlinger's essay on 'Disraeli and Orientalism' further explored Disraeli's entrenchment in nineteenth-century assumptions about the Orient, and the manner in which Disraeli self-fashioned an exotic, oriental identity.[65]

Ivan Davidson Kalmar expanded on Brantlinger's themes in an article called 'Benjamin Disraeli, Romantic Orientalist' (2005). Kalmar negotiated Disraeli within Said's notion of Orientalism: the dual attraction and repulsion for the East felt by European imperialists. Contributing to the re-appraisal of Disraeli's Jewishness and romanticism in *Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, Kalmar argued that Disraeli's Jewishness and Romanticism could be better understood together 'under the rubric of orientalism, noting that his Jewishness was in his as well as his opponents' views thoroughly "oriental"'.[66] Rather than viewing it as an expedient identity as had Berlin and Arendt, Kalmar claimed that 'Disraeli's "Semitic" identity was not an eccentric personal foible as much as a reflection of a widely held attitude towards the "Jewish race" and its history. Jewish pride in being oriental was no rarity. Disraeli espoused it with considerable and *consistent* passion'.[67] But Disraeli's multiple discussions of religious truth and divinity in his novels played no part in Kalmar's notion of Disraeli's Jewishness. Kalmar interpreted Disraeli's discussion of 'Judaism [as] Christianity for the multitude' in *Tancred*, for example, in such clichéd functional and secular terms, that it is worth citing at length. Kalmar claimed that, to Disraeli,

> what distinguished Jesus was not moral or spiritual innovation, and certainly not his divine characters, as much as his public relations skills: Jesus was more effective than Moses in spreading the message God gave to the Jews [. . .] the Jesus we meet here is a charismatic popularizer who managed to 'package' Judaism for the Gentile masses.[68]

Such language to describe Disraeli's notion of Judaism is astoundingly anachronistic, and becomes even more so when we explore the specific nineteenth-century contexts to which

[65] *Idem*., 'Disraeli and Orientalism' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, pp. 90-105.
[66] Ivan Davidson Kalmar, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Romantic Orientalist', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47:2 (2005), p. 350.
[67] *Ibid*., p. 352; original emphasis.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 354.

Disraeli responded in his writing. His Jewish education and reading, his expression of biblical themes in his fiction, and his continued assertion of the compatibility of Judaism and Christianity, are much more accurately understood in nineteenth-century frameworks than in the language of 'public relations' and of delivering attractive 'packages' to consumers.

Disraeli's religious ideas, in addition to disappearing within discussions about his racial, romantic, and oriental philosophy, have also been lost within recent work on the deep connection between his fiction and political thought. These either too deeply divide, or too deeply conflate, Disraeli's political ideology and his religious beliefs in his novels. When they are conflated, his religious content in the novels is read purely politically. Jennifer Conary, for example, argued that 'while the novel presents its social and political insights through the medium of a fanciful guest narrative, *Tancred*'s romanticism is used artfully to present a radical political agenda'; she saw *Tancred* as, ironically, 'much more practical in its take on reform than either *Coningsby* or *Sybil*'.[69] Her ensuing discussion, then, focused on the novel's political implications, while paying little specific attention to the theological notions that underpinned Tancred's new ideology. Throughout his writing, Endelman has similarly suggested that Disraeli constructed his Jewishness merely to serve his political identity; in Endelman's words, 'Disraeli's obsession with Jewish themes took told only in the 1840s, that is, after he entered politics'.[70] But Disraeli's early fiction – long before the advent of his political career – suggests that his Judaism was not an epiphenomenal, secondary identity that he flaunted to counteract attacks on his ethnicity. As we shall see in Chapter 2, Disraeli's writing during the 1830s demonstrates his deep reading of the Old Testament and interest in medieval Jewish mysticism.

The two most recent monographs published on Disraeli share this approach to his thought: what do his expressions reveal about his psychological desire to ascend the political ladder? Robert O'Kell's *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (2013) explicitly collated all of the

[69] Jennifer Conary, '"Dreaming over an Unattainable End": Disraeli's *Tancred* and the Failure of Reform', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38 (2010), p. 76.
[70] Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end"', p. 115.

ideologies and motivations in Disraeli's fiction under a psychological label: 'the fiction, however consciously organized, represents an embodiment of fantasies about himself'.[71] Within this interpretation, Disraeli's fiction and political career were two sides of the same 'inventive' and 'imaginative' coin: they were each elaborate fabrications.[72] The 'fantasy structures' that O'Kell identified as running through Disraeli's fiction and political action contained no space or consideration for theological or religious ideas. All became subsumed in Disraeli's desires for power and 'maternal acceptance'; accordingly, the moral and religious tensions within the novels became 'a paradigm for demonstrating the triumph of purity of motive over expediency, principle over ambition'.[73] Disraeli's theological ideas became, within O'Kell's methodology, subspecies of fantasy structures. Take, for example, O'Kell's interpretation of the religious significance of the character Sybil: 'To understand the full meaning of Sybil's emblematic role, it is essential to see the significance of other characters in the larger allegorical romance. Inevitably this brings one to Disraeli's peculiar ideas about Christianity and Judaism, and to his feelings about Roman Catholicism'.[74] Christian and Jewish characters became for O'Kell peculiar expressions within an overriding 'allegorical romance'. This anachronistically inverted Disraeli's priorities, putting secular psychological motivations in a position to govern religious ideas.

The late David Cesarani's *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (2016) conformed to the same assumption – the Disraeli's religious ideas ultimately served a purpose outside of religiosity – while trying to achieve different goals. The monograph was published as part of Yale University Press' series *Jewish Lives*. In the very first line of the monograph, Cesarani laid out its main research question: 'Does Benjamin Disraeli deserve a place in a series of books called Jewish Lives?'[75] Broadly speaking, Cesarani answered 'No'. The thrust of his argument, like Hannah Arendt's, was that Disraeli became Jewish and flaunted his Jewishness 'for

[71] O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, p. 7.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 8.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 289.
[74] *Ibid*., p. 264.
[75] Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, p. 1.

meretricious reasons', but that ultimately, 'it was no more than a fantasy of the pseudoscientific racial thinking that dominated society for a century until it was utterly discredited by Nazism'.[76] Indeed, the fact that 'he was one of the last court Jews and one of the first victims of modern anti-Semitism' were the only manners in which Cesarani conceded that Disraeli could be considered Jewish. His Jewishness stemmed from his experience of existing in the world, rather than from his own research into his identity or ideas about Judaism.

Accordingly, rather than setting out to meet Disraeli on his own terms, Cesarani intended to ascertain whether Disraeli's religious expression would pass the litmus test of conforming to 'conventional' Jewish experience in the nineteenth century. He concluded that Disraeli failed this test in multiple ways. Firstly, aside from his racialisation of Jewishness, Disraeli's 'valorisation of Judaism depend[ed] upon Christian supersession', and therefore was not really Jewish at all.[77] Secondly, Cesarani claimed that 'Disraeli never took a stand on the issue of general prejudice against the Jews, either as a matter of principle or on pragmatic grounds'.[78] With regard to the fiction, Cesarani claimed that Disraeli was 'ignorant' and 'uncaring about Judaism'.[79] His take on *Tancred*, for example, amounted to lining up Disraeli's description of Jerusalem with a typically Jewish impression of the Holy City:

> There is very little that is 'Jewish' about the Jerusalem through which Tancred moves, notwithstanding his exaggerated appreciation of the Jewish legacy . . . He does not go to a synagogue, and there is no mention of the Western Wall. The real Jewish Jerusalem is invisible. Instead, Disraeli regales the reader with a fantasy of Judaism in which 'the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is now worshipped before every altar in Rome'.[80]

This 'fantasy of Judaism', which Cesarani dismissed as unreligious, is precisely what this thesis is interested in. Where did this fantasy come from, and how did it seek to incorporate religious and biblical traditions? How did it interact with religious traditions – did it replace

[76] *Ibid*., p. 231, 227.
[77] *Ibid*., p. 112.
[78] *Ibid*.
[79] *Ibid*., p. 59.
[80] *Ibid*., p. 106.

them? What does this indicate about the religious landscape of Victorian Britain? Moreover, as Maurice Cowling established, even the most 'secular' fantasies are often expressions of confessional agendas. The fact that Disraeli wrote religious fantasies at all merits an analysis of his own confessional agenda: what influenced it, and how did it informe his understanding of the world?

These interpretations of Disraeli's religious thought in recent years – as a racial identity or theory, or as a romantic fascination with the Orient, or as a psychological phenomenon – are fundamentally different academic projects from a study interested in Disraeli's religious thought. Disciplinary boundaries have precluded a cohesive illustration of Disraeli's religious, racial, and political ideology, and the complicated interrelationships between these areas of his thought. Indeed, these constructions of Disraeli as a psychologically motivated, proto-secular political thinker exemplify a historiography that remains almost entirely conditional on the ideological and religious attitudes of Disraeli's historians, as they wrote within a burgeoning secular intellectual tradition. This state of scholarship necessitates the large scale re-examination of Disraeli's religious writings upon which this thesis now embarks.

V.

Disraeli and Religion

To address these historiographical imbalances, this thesis offers a contextualized and revised reading of Disraeli's religious ideas. In the following chapters, it adopts a thematic rather than a chronological approach. This allows a sustained focus on the research question, which is concerned with the nature of Disraeli's religious ideas as he expressed them. In presenting the main themes that constituted his theology, I remain aware of the broad ideological shifts that Disraeli underwent over time: from the silver-fork novelist in the 1820s, to the Radical-turned-Conservative MP in the 1830s, leader of the Protectionist Tories under Lord George Bentinck, and figurehead for Young England in the 1840s. In the 1850s he worked from the opposition benches in an effort to establish a robust new Conservatism based on his belief in the territorial constitution and the institutions of the country as the only guarantee for the liberty of its people. This took on renewed energy in the 1860s, when he established a 'Church in danger' cry with the bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, and championed the preservation of the established church in Ireland. His first premiership came to a hasty end in 1868, but in 1874 he began a lengthy tenure as prime minister which would see him arrange for the purchase of the Suez Canal, return from the Congress of Berlin in victory, and establish Queen Victoria as the Empress of India.

Accordingly, each of the five following chapters attends to the historical and intellectual contexts of Disraeli's novels as they were written throughout the decades of his career. Chapter 1, 'Reinterpretation', brings the dynamism and variety of religious ideas and practice in nineteenth-century England back to the centre of our discussion of Disraeli's thought and texts by presenting an overview of how Disraeli's writing corresponded to the major religious events in each decade of his life. Recent work scarcely comments on Disraeli's intellectual relationship with Christianity, the Church, the Darwinian controversy, or religious Judaism as he understood it. Nor do recent scholars consider how his arguments for the indispensability of faith to the nation might compare with other thinkers. It becomes

necessary, therefore, to highlight the events and controversies that most influenced Disraeli's religious thought –the Maynooth Grant of 1845, the debate over a Roman Catholic episcopacy in England in 1852, Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), *Essays and Reviews* (1860), German biblical criticism, and the question of Irish disestablishment in the 1860s – so that throughout the subsequent chapters, the historical and ideological scaffolding within which Disraeli thought and wrote about religion remains highlighted.

Having laid out the manner in which Disraeli's work interacted with the intellectual transformations of his period, the second section of Chapter 1 then considers his contemporaneous biographers, who recognized and understood Disraeli's religious ideas. James Anthony Froude and Charles Alexander Ewald, for example, each of whom had complicated confessional positions themselves, placed Disraeli's religious thought at the centre of his intellectual system. They situated his unconventional religious expression on the spectrum of Victorian belief, in which oscillations between faith and doubt, and in which undulations between Judaism and Christianity, were allowable. In their sensitivity to Disraeli's religious ideas, these early biographers illuminate, by contrast, the secularization of his thought that occurred in the following decades, and point to the need for the correctives that come in the subsequent chapters.

In the words of Timothy Larsen, 'There are only two kinds of eminent Victorian authors – the kind who have had a whole book written about their use of Scripture and the kind who are ripe for such attention'.[81] Chapter 2, 'Scripture', demonstrates that Disraeli is absolutely ripe for such attention. Disraeli wrote within a literary culture which remained deeply invested in the Bible as the prototypical form of narrative authority. The first section of Chapter 2 suggests that while the poetry and fiction of the period inflected, transformed, and challenged this authority, it remained in constant conversation with the Bible. Though one would never guess it from reading his biographies, Disraeli actively participated in this religious literary discourse. The second section surfaces Disraeli's biblical reading and his

[81] Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford, 2011), p. 2.

engagement with biblical narratives in his fiction. It focuses especially on the novel *Alroy* (1833) and argues that while it has been taken as evidence for his Byronic Romanticism, Disraeli based the narrative of *Alroy* on Old Testament tropes of kingship and chosenness. The chapter as a whole argues that key aspects of Disraeli's understanding of the individual, of society, and of the nation arose from his understanding of biblical themes.

Chapter 3, 'Faith', considers five central aspects of Disraeli's religious thought, each of which relate to one another. It begins by suggesting that his understanding of the Jews and the Holy Land comprised a figurative Zionism. While he never realised any efforts to return the Jews to Israel, the Jews' status as the chosen people of God, and their covenantal connection to the land of Israel, became emblematic to him of the kind of providentially guided nation he believed that England should be. Disraeli's exaltation of the Jews and the Holy Land throughout his writing did not merely amount to, in Hannah Arendt's words, 'a full-blown race doctrine out of [an] empty concept of a historic mission'.[82] Rather, he offered his imagined notion of the Holy Land as an ideological solution to the brokenness of the condition of England. Instead of assessing the degree to which he 'should' or should not be considered a Jew, which has too long occupied historians' attention, to little gain, this section simply focuses on the ideas that Disraeli possessed about Jews and Jerusalem, and suggests that they were integral to his religious vision of England.

The second section of Chapter 3 argues that Disraeli's idea of the 'great man' in history should be reframed and reconnected to his notion of religious chosenness. Like Thomas Carlyle's, Disraeli's heroes were not only great statesmen and legislators; they possessed a spiritual exceptionalism and an ability to read the moral compass of the nation that allowed them, and even destined them, to lead. While scholars have overwhelmingly read Disraeli's heroic protagonists psychologically, as mirror images of himself, this section suggests that they are better understood within a discourse of the 'chosen one' that characterized both

[82] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 73.

Disraeli's biblical and Jewish reading, and a growing Carlylean and Romantic discourse in nineteenth-century Britain about the spiritual power of individuals.

Disraeli aspired to become a 'great man' himself. This would be accomplished, in no small part, by his adoption of the role of the country gentleman and landowner. Particularly central to that role were Disraeli's activities in his parish church at Hughenden Manor. The third section of Chapter 3 explores Disraeli's broad and practical religious practice according to the theory of 'lived religion' set out above. It shows that he advocated an applied religious faith that found expression in civic acts of responsibility and patronage. Further, Disraeli modelled the parochial scenes in the Young England novels on his own travels and experiences in parish life.

Just as Disraeli's scriptural allusion remains a neglected aspect of his work as a thinker and writer, his interest in biblical criticism and the controversial new school of 'Neology' have gone largely unnoticed in secondary scholarship. The fourth section of Chapter 3 demonstrates that Disraeli followed German criticism and theological debates closely and discussed them at length with his colleagues, especially the young Edward Stanley. He read Hegel, Renan, and Strauss, and expressed considerable interest in the future of Christianity as a belief system. In this sense, Disraeli was influenced in his religious ideas by the very trends which he opposed so vigorously in his novels: the tendency towards scepticism, criticism, and heterodox understandings of Scripture. A consideration of Disraeli's simultaneous interest in, and rejection of Neology further nuances our understanding of his faith position.

The final section of Chapter 3 considers one of Disraeli's most famous novels, *Lothair* (1870). While critics have largely interpreted the work as an anti-Catholic treatise, designed to serve Disraeli in his political ambitions, the chapter argues that the novel is better understood as Disraeli's attempt to combat the threat of unbelief as he saw it within neological understandings of the Bible and in the burgeoning fields of scientific materialism. Disraeli puts his protagonist Lothair through a labyrinth of different faith positions, not to suggest that Anglicanism was the only sectarian position, but to advocate a broad personal faith and

fervent public piety in the face of the amorality of materialism. Chapter 3 as a whole presents the intertwined, and at times, contradictory nature of Disraeli's central religious ideas. But it also embeds them in the contexts in which they were formed, to show that their complexity was far from abnormal within the theological circumstances of Victorian Britain.

Building on the religious ideas set out in the preceding chapters, Chapter 4, 'Race', tackles the widespread assumption in scholarship that Disraeli was a racial, rather than a religious thinker. The first section recalls the pervasiveness of this assumption by revisiting the secondary literature on Disraeli and race. The second section then explores the race idea as it existed in nineteenth-century Britain, showing that the entire paradigm of 'race' arose in concurrence with shifts in scriptural interpretation. As Colin Kidd has shown, many of the earliest 'racial scientists' were in fact Christians who sought to vindicate passages of Scripture, especially as the literal truth of Bible came under scrutiny from new schools of biblical criticism. Disraeli participated in a racial discourse, then, which was entirely subsumed in religious assumptions and which existed as a species of a larger religious metanarrative to which he explicitly subscribed. The final section of the chapter demonstrates that Disraeli wrote and thought about race in emphatically religious terms; his novels show that he viewed race as essentially a religious category.

Chapter 5, 'Nation', explores the manner in which Disraeli's religious ideas established in the previous chapters – his interest in biblical nations, his celebration of the Jewish theocracy, his cry for belief amid a faithless polity, his nostalgia for a purer religious moment in England's past – connected to his vision of the constitution and soil of the English nation. It revisits well-known Disraelian political ideologies and events, but interprets them through the lens of the theology that has come to light in previous chapters. The first section demonstrates that he viewed the British Constitution as a sacred text of sorts, which demanded faith-based contracts between the different classes which comprised the country. The second section claims that he similarly viewed the land – literally, the soil – of England as sacrosanct. Rather than a conventional Burkean reverence for the territorial constitution, Disraeli presented the English land as the New Israel, and described the relationship between

the land and the people according to his idea of God's promise of the Holy Land to the Jews. Indeed, Disraeli viewed the polity of England as accountable to the same laws between nation and God that characterized the Old Testament narratives which he explored in his early fiction.

The Conclusion suggests that placing Disraeli's engagement with religion in these contexts not only fills an important gap in Disraeli scholarship; it also addresses methodological issues involved in practicing Victorian religious history. The thesis as a whole hopes to offer an important corrective to nineteenth-century history by highlighting the ways in which Disraeli participated in evolving religious testimonies and traditions in nineteenth-century Britain, while challenging existing assumptions that religion operates as an isolated set of ideas and or subscriptions to doctrine. It provides, of course, only a beginning. But by highlighting some of the main ideas that governed Disraeli's religious thought, it aims to reframe the conversation about one of the leading figures of Victorian politics, and to suggest new ways of approaching religious thought historically.

CHAPTER 1

REINTERPRETATION

> The religious views of those who hold the highest offices in the government must ever be matter of the deepest interest to a nation whose civil constitution contains ecclesiastical elements so numerous and so vitally important as that of England. The religious earnestness which characterizes our age, makes the country doubly alive to the theological opinions and tendencies of its leading statesmen.[1]

In an essay published in 1998, Todd Endelman expressed an enduring assumption about Disraeli's religious attitudes. He claimed that 'Disraeli's Christianity was as muddled as his Judaism and for much of the same reason: neither the doctrinal nor experiential side of religion was important to him'.[2] This claim requires the existence of, and the historian's ability to access, a set of neat, monolithic, doctrinally un-muddled categories of Victorian religious experience. Such uniform categories did not exist. Rather, Disraeli's 'muddled' faith position, perhaps counterintuitively, represents the variety of nineteenth-century religious expression and points to some of the challenges to the neat lines of religious doctrine in this period.

As we have seen, biographical studies of Disraeli's life nearly always emphasize his political career – his electoral defeats and triumphs, and moments of notable domestic or foreign diplomacy – or his notoriety as a mercurial public figure. This chapter tells a different story. The intensity and pervasiveness of Victorian religious thought and practice, across both Christian and Jewish communities, and the extent to which religious debates penetrated public discourse, remains a context from which Disraeli has been almost entirely removed in the historiography. The first section of this chapter aims to place Disraeli back into that context, by reintroducing the intellectual and theological frameworks in which he thought and wrote about religion. It introduces the intersections between nineteenth-century religious

[1] Hughenden MSS 227 E/IV/10n [name of publication obscured], 'Mr. Disraeli and His Views'.
[2] Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, p. 127.

culture and Disraeli's thought and writing in order to set the stage for analysis of his religious ideas in subsequent chapters. Contrary to his representation as a ruthless pragmatist who remained, in Endelman's words, 'religiously indifferent', Disraeli contributed to questions about the role of Scripture in public morality in the 1830s and 1840s, both in his own interpretations of the Bible in his fiction, and in his insistence that the health of the nation depended on biblical and religious, rather than self-created ethics. His reading of Scripture, Jewish mythology (the Kabbala), and the influence he took from his father, Isaac D'Israeli, informed Disraeli's defence of an established church and confessional state in both his fiction and political rhetoric. Both Isaac and Benjamin Disraeli attributed the 'genius of Judaism', as Isaac called it in the title of one of his books, to the 'Jewish theocracy': the complete fusion of piety and polity in ancient Jewish practice. Disraeli's belief in this notion of a faithful public, whose religious and civil laws worked together indissolubly, led him to encourage a broadly faithful nation composed of different creeds held together within a strong established Church and a Constitution that required faith-based contracts between classes and institutions. Warring church factions threatened to tear the fabric of faith that held society together, especially as the 1850s and 1860s introduced new threats and challenges to the Church of England and the veracity of religious establishment in general. Such was the theme of *Lothair* (1870), in which Disraeli responded to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), *Essays and Reviews* (1860), the issue of Irish church disestablishment, and increasingly contentious debates about the relationship between scriptural and scientific truth. By the end of his life, Disraeli had established an unmistakeable, and yet often ignored group of texts which pled for a new kind of theocracy in the face of unbelief and materialism.

Yet Disraeli's religious expressions have been regarded as a subspecies of either a fundamentally secular political project, or an un-religious, psychological pursuit to realize his true self. The second section of this chapter therefore reconsiders early histories and biographies of Disraeli as valuable and neglected sources for Disraeli's religious ideas, largely because they reflect this same religious and intellectual atmosphere that has been lost in twentieth-century constructions of Victorian ideology. Disraeli's contemporaneous

biographers interpreted him as a religious thinker through the lens of their own confessional allegiances and notions of present theological controversies. They distinguished themselves from Disraeli's twentieth- and twenty-first-century biographers in two important ways. Writing at the same time of diverse Victorian theological expression, they take Disraeli's religious ideas seriously. Further, and perhaps more noteworthy from a historiographical perspective, contemporary biographers rigorously contextualised Disraeli's religious ideas, rather than considering them in isolation. For example, they never discussed *Tancred* (1847) without a prefacing consideration of Tractarianism and of the condition of England question, a practice has been almost entirely abandoned in recent histories.

This chapter as a whole puts Disraeli's intellectual and religious context at the fore of his ideas. It demonstrates that his attempt to articulate a united Judeo-Christian theology would have appeared less anomalous in the context of nineteenth-century religious debates than Disraeli's later historians have presumed. Disraeli's novels, non-fiction, and letters indicate that he engaged in a nineteenth-century religious atmosphere which accommodated diverse and progressing religious expression; it included both scepticism and doubt on the one hand, and an insistence on the prevailing wisdom of religious tradition and religious truth on the other. Such 'muddled' religious ideas as Disraeli's could be said to personify many nineteenth-century responses to the ideological, social, and political change that characterised the period. Only when we have a clear overall picture of these contexts and, broadly, how Disraeli responded to them, can we deepen the exploration of Disraeli's religious ideas in subsequent chapters.

I.

Disraeli and Victorian religious thought: a connection lost

A distinct and rather clichéd image of religious respectability often characterizes the Victorian period. The architect and evangelical T.G. Jackson was considered so respectable that, in William Whyte's words, 'his dark-suited office clerk was popularly supposed to be his private chaplain'.[3] No such rumours circulated about Disraeli, the dandified wit who allegedly preferred to speak in opaque aphorisms. The stereotypical construction of Victorian Protestant Christianity, as Sheridan Gilley has put it, 'a religion centred on the hearth, on daily family prayer, Bible reading and Sabbath observance, and upon a spirit of "holy worldliness"' proves unhelpful in imagining Disraeli's religious thought and practice.[4] This helps to explain why twentieth-century historians, often operating within an unreconstructed illustration of the period as embattled in a great fight between secularism and evangelicalism, excluded Disraeli from the scene. In locating Disraeli within the terrain of nineteenth-century religion, it becomes more constructive to think about the manifold fault lines across which religious questioning and confessional negotiation occurred in this period, and how many of those fault lines ran through Disraeli's thought and work. Religious issues dominated political discourse in the decades of Disraeli's intellectual growth in the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s, during which he wrote his early fiction and undertook his first political campaigns. His career as a writer, thinker, and political player necessitated engagement with religious controversies and demanded that he take part in a wide-scale redefinition of religious and ecclesiastical values. Historians and biographers have acknowledged Disraeli's political rhetoric on church reform in the 1830s, and his 'Church in Danger' cry in the 1860s.[5] But beyond this impetus in his political life, Disraeli wrote copiously about religion: scrutiny into the inerrancy of the

[3] William Whyte, *Oxford Jackson: Architecture, Education, Status, and Style 1835-1924* (Oxford, 2006), p. 24.
[4] Sheridan Gilley, 'The Church of England in the Nineteenth Century', in Gilley and W.J. Sheils, (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 294-5.
[5] For the most recent and comprehensive of such studies, see Allen Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives and the National Church, 1837-1881', *Parliamentary History* 19:1 (2000), pp. 96-117. See also Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), especially pp. 336-91.

Bible, the role of centralized religious institutions to fragile societies, the personal search for existential truth, and the danger of self-government, versus religious faith, dominated his early fiction. These themes demonstrate the degree to which Disraeli engaged in religious polemics outside of the political sphere, and point to a connection that has been lost in the secondary literature: that between Disraeli and Victorian religious thought.

After the 'long eighteenth century', notionally characterized by its absentee clergy and dormant church life, the first half of the nineteenth century saw the urgent attempt to reform, reshape, and re-vitalize the Church of England.[6] This led to a growing public perception of an established church under siege by the forces of industrialisation, growing numbers of Christian dissenters, increasing emphasis on the power of scientific empiricism to explain natural phenomena, and a loosening grip on orthodox doctrine by clergy and laity alike. The now widely-held revised claim about religiosity in this period is that these perceived threats to the Church, in Sheridan Gilley's words, 'sparked one of the most remarkable institutional and spiritual revivals in its history, resulting in liveliness and creative tension as well as division between the Protestant, Catholic and liberal traditions within Anglicanism'.[7] The same forces that endangered the swaying scaffolding of traditional ecclesiastical institutions also instigated attempts to rebuild the structures, and re-establish the stability of the public

[6] This narrative was largely upheld in the traditional literature on the Victorian Church. See, for example Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (2 vols., London, 1966-1970) especially i, pp. 527-72 for the threats to orthodoxy and efforts to restate faith in the face of them. A number of recent studies reiterate the notion of nineteenth-century British religion as vigorous and adaptable. See Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006). Larsen suggests that even the traditional narrative of the 'Victorian Crisis of Faith' – a subspecies of the secularisation thesis – if evidence that religious activity and re-evaluation was rife in the period; such crises were often the result of the evangelical emphasis on a robust, personal experience of the truth of the gospel, and that there were as many accounts of crises of doubt as there were of faith. See also Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore, and Brian Young (eds), *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950* (Cambridge, 2000), especially pp. 91-178 for the fundamental place of religion in nineteenth-century intellectual history. For religious revival and renewal across Christian sects, see Jane Garnett and H.C.G. Matthew, *Revival and Religion Since 1700: Essays for John Walsh* (London, 1993).

[7] Gilley and Sheils, (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain*, p. 6. For the persistent religious – rather than secular – forces which uprooted the confessional relationship between Church and State, see Edward Norman, 'Church & State since 1800', pp. 277-90. For a good discussion of devotional reactions to Enlightenment reason, across geographical contexts, see Salvador Ryan and Henning Lauderud (eds.), *Devotional Cultures of European Christianity* (2012).

role of religious morality and practice. The Evangelical Revival,[8] the social, political and religious ideology of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s,[9] the foundation of the Cambridge Camden Society in the 1840s,[10] the architectural revivals carried out with specific religious visions,[11] the continuing vitality of dissenting practice, as demonstrated by the 1851 Religious Census,[12] and the devotional underpinnings of much Romantic and Victorian literature, all attest to the tenacity of religious thought, art, and practice during this period.[13] Nor was this flurry of religious redefinition confined to Christian circles. Judaism in Britain underwent large scale changes in ideology, liturgy, practice, and community identity throughout the nineteenth century.[14] Indeed, Disraeli's extensive writing on the Jews participated in a wider redefinition of what it meant to be Jewish and English.[15] Perhaps no century was more invested and engaged in a dynamic public intellectual conversation about morality, theology,

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[8] For the salience of the Methodist revivals to the nineteenth-century religious landscape, see David Bebbington, *Holiness in nineteenth-century England* (Carlisle, 2000) and *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford, 2012).

[9] For the cross-pollination between the Tractarians' theological and socio-political thought, see Simon Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England': The Social and Political Thought of the Oxford Movement* (Oxford, 2004). See Frank Turner, *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven, 2002) for the depth and breadth of J.H. Newman's and the Tractarians' religious and social vision.

[10] For the Cambridge Camden Society, see James F. White, *The Cambridge Movement: The Ecclesiologists and the Gothic Revival*. (Cambridge, 1962) and Christopher Webster and John Elliott, *'A Church as it should be': The Cambridge Camden Society and its Influence* (Stamford, 2000).

[11] See Whyte, *Oxford Jackson*, especially the Introduction for the role of Jackson's evangelicalism, and pp. 27-52 for architectural dilemmas which reflected theological concerns, and pp. 88-130 for the interaction between Oxford's theological controversies and architecture in the nineteenth century.

[12] See G.M. Young and W.D. Handock (eds.), *English Historical Documents*, xii (1), 1833-74, Part IV, pp. 371-95; see also 'The 1851 Census of Religious Worship' in K. D. M. Snell and Paul S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 23-53.

[13] See R.J. Barth, *Romanticism and Transcendence: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the religious imagination* (Columbia, 2003). For the way in which the theological impetus of Tractarianism conversed with broader Romantic ideologies, including those to which Disraeli responded, see Michael H. Bright, 'English Literary Romanticism and the Oxford Movement', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40 (1979), pp. 385-404.

[14] See Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford, 1992). David Biale (ed.), *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (New York, 2002). See also Stephen Brook, *The Club: The Jews of Modern Britain* (London, 1990); David Cesarani, *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge, 1994); Anne and Roger Cowen, *Victorian Jews through British Eyes* (Oxford, 1986); Todd Endelman, *Leaving the Jewish Fold: Conversion and Radical Assimilation in Modern Jewish History* (Princeton, 2015); Todd Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656-2000* (Berkeley: 2002). Israel Finestein, *Jewish Society in Victorian England* (London, 1993).

[15] Sheila A. Spector is one of the few scholars to work on Disraeli in this context. See Spector (ed.), *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature* (New York, 2002) and Spector (ed.), *Romanticism/Judaica: A Convergence of Cultures* (Farnham, 2011); Judith W. Page, 'Anglo-Jewish Identity and the Politics of Cultivation in Hazlitt, Aguilar, and Disraeli' in Sheila A. Spector (ed.), *The Jews and British Romanticism: Politics, Religion, Culture* (New York, 2005), pp. 149-164.

doctrine, and existential truth. As one study put it, aptly, 'throughout the nineteenth century, it is hard to find political issues that were *not* overlaid and influenced by religious debate'.[16] It was in this public sphere that Disraeli sought to make not only a political mark, but, crucially, a literary and intellectual mark.

Even a cursory survey of Disraeli's novels and their plots shows how intricately his religious work interwove with pivotal events in the public discourse about Judaism and Christianity in this period. Among the most important catalysts for subsequent battles over the role of the established church to the nation were the repeal of the Tests and Corporation Acts (1828), and the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829) which removed the barriers that disallowed Catholics and Nonconformists from entering government without swearing an oath of allegiance to the Church of England. While Catholic Emancipation dominated public discourse, Disraeli suffered a period of depression during the winter of 1829-30, during which he cloistered himself in his father's library at Bradenham, according to Geoffrey Harvey, 'avidly reading books on the Jews, Judaism, Islam, and the Middle East'.[17] It is no coincidence that Disraeli gravitated towards questions of religious inheritance in his reading. Not only did religion dominate the public arena which Disraeli hoped to enter; but for the past several years, he had been actively questioning his own place in the universe. In 1827 he wrote to his father's friend Sharon Turner – who, incidentally, had been responsible for his baptism – describing his depression and his struggle with ambition as a moment of existential reckoning:

> I am at present quite idle being at this moment slowly recovering from one of those tremendous disorganisations which happen to all men at some period of their lives, and which perhaps are equally necessary for the formation both of the body and the constitution. Whether I shall ever do anything which may mark me out from the crowd I know not. I am one of those to whom moderate reputation can give no pleasure, and who, in all probability, am incapable of achieving a great one. But how this may be I care not. I have ceased to be dazzled with the glittering bubbles which float on the troubled

[16] Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 27.
[17] Geoffrey Harvey (ed.), *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (in *The early novels of Benjamin Disraeli*, 6 vols, London, 2004), iv, p. vii. For a psychoanalytical study of Disraeli's depression, see Charles Richmond and Jerrold M. Post, 'Disraeli's Crucial Illness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 66-89.

> ocean of existence. Whatever is granted I shall receive with composure, and that which is witholden, I shall not regret.[18]

These questions of identity, fame, and philosophical self-definition took centre stage in his novel *The Young Duke* (1829). But this early novel was not merely an introspective work of youthful fiction. At the height of the controversy over Catholic Emancipation, *The Young Duke* complicated the notion of a rigidly-drawn Anglican/Roman Catholic binary by exploring the discrepancy between creed and morality. In the story, the Duke of St James entrusts the guardianship of his only son, 'the young duke', not to an aristocratic Anglican relative, but to 'Mr. Dacre, a Catholic gentleman of ancient family and large fortune'.[19] The novel satirizes the entitled and vain Anglican family who believe they should act as guardians to the young duke: Disraeli gives them the sardonic title, 'Earl of Fitz-pompey'. The Fitz-pompeys embark on a manipulative campaign to demonize Mr Dacre and to secure their own influence over the duke. They regard Dacre as 'a harsh and repulsive stranger' and a 'grim tyrant', who would lead the duke to 'a life of stern privation and irrational restraint'.[20] In the end, however, the duke realizes the Fitz-pompeys' moral depravity compared to the Dacre family, and he falls in love with May Dacre, whose Roman Catholic virtue and piety provides the antithesis to the selfishness he learned from the Fitz-pompeys. When she rejects his hand in marriage, he confronts his religious hollowness:

> [The Young Duke] found himself among the ruins of Dacre Abbey. The silence and solemnity of the scene made him conscious, by the contrast, of his own agitated existence; the desolation of the beautiful ruin accorded with his own crushed and beautiful hopes. He sat himself at the feet of the clustered columns, and, covering his face with his hands, he wept.[21]

Disraeli created blatant moral tensions between the vanity of the Anglican Fitz-pompey family and the politically-active, ancient, and religiously wholesome Roman Catholic Dacre family. The protagonist overcomes his own self-aggrandizement through the adoption of ancient religious principles, which cause him to worship something other than himself. The novel

[18] *BDL*, i, p. 102, Disraeli to Sharon Turner, 5 Mar. 1827.
[19] Benjamin Disraeli, *The Young Duke* (London, 1927), p. 5.
[20] *Ibid*., pp. 5-6.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 125.

illustrated Disraeli hashing out the complexities of confessional allegiances and personal morality at a moment of particular political sensitivity.

The same period of reading in his father's library influenced Disraeli's decision to embark on his 'Grand Tour' in 1830-1.[22] *The Young Duke* helped to fund Disraeli's trip, in which he travelled to Spain, Malta, Gibraltar, Turkey, and Jerusalem in 1830 and 1831. His experiences in the East fuelled his interest in the religious identities and the benefits of religious pluralism, and as Jonathan Parry suggests, encouraged the 'self-consciousness [and] moral relativism' that would characterise much of his writing about religion.[23] After his return from the tour, in the summer of 1831, Disraeli wrote *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* and *The Rise of Iskander* which were published together in 1833. *Alroy* – the longer and more popular of the two – comprised Disraeli's reinterpretation of the legend of a twelfth-century Jewish Messiah figure who led a campaign to recapture the Holy Land from the reigning Turkish Caliphate. The myth was originally attributed to Moses Maimonides, the Sephardic philosopher and Torah scholar in twelfth-century Egypt. Isaac D'Israeli's collection of Maimonides' works formed the primary sources for Disraeli's version of the Alroy story. Among D'Israeli's materials was a notebook entitled, 'David El Roi: A Tale of the Cabbala' which had disparate notes and fragments of narrative based on the legend of David El Roi, whose name translated from Hebrew to mean 'the God who sees' (as in Genesis). Many of the descriptions of the Middle East in *Alroy* and in *Tancred*, published eleven years later in 1845, bore close resemblance to his letters home during his travels.

In *Alroy* many of the forces that influenced Disraeli's intellectual maturation came together: Jewish religious practice and texts, the Romantic style of Byron, the quest for genius, and the idea of being part of a great and ordained nation. But scholars have overlooked the extent to which Disraeli drew deeply on biblical and kabbalistic reading in crafting the novel.

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[22] For the details of Disraeli's travels, see Robert Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour: Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-1* (New York, 1982). Chapters 2 & 3 of this thesis challenge Blake's reading of Disraeli's experiences in the Middle East.

[23] Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli, Benjamin, earl of Beaconsfield (1804–1881)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/7689].

In his retelling of the myth, Disraeli created characters who spoke in an amalgam language of the King James Bible, attempted Shakespearian monologue, and the flamboyant vocabulary of the Byronic epic.[24] It is no coincidence that Disraeli wrote home to his sister Sarah in January 1833: 'Send me also my bible'.[25] The novel's structure emulated the kingship narratives in the Deuteronomic history: God's call of a new and unexpected king of Israeli, followed by the king's exile, and concluded by the king's temptation and fall. In Disraeli's plot, Alroy is called by God and anointed; he attempts to lead his nation out of captivity by recapturing the Holy Land through providentially determined battles; and he eventually falls from obedience and righteousness into the temptations of hubris, disobedient intermarriage, and idolatry. Through these biblical tropes, the novel interrogated the question of whether the Jews should remain a separate nation, bound by their religious law, or whether they must relax their rituals in order to govern themselves more pragmatically in relationship to other peoples.

These same questions about the Israelite nation acted centrally in Isaac D'Israeli's *The Genius of Judaism* (1833) written and published the same year as *Alroy*.[26] In the text, D'Israeli set out what constituted the 'peculiarity' of the Jewish people, namely their divinely instated law.[27] It is understandable that Benjamin and Isaac read, thought, and wrote about the condition of the Jews as a religious people and as a political entity at this moment in the 1830s. The pressures on Christian institutions and theologies affected Christian attitudes towards Judaism, the manner in which Christians called on Jewish history and theology, and of course, ideological change within Jewish communities. A significant discourse about the

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[24] For contemporary reviews of *Alroy* see R.W. Stewart (ed.), *Disraeli's Novels Reviewed 1826-1968* (Metuchen, N.J, 1975), pp. 144-148.
[25] *BDL*, i, p. 320, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 29 Jan 1833. See Chapter 2 for a full discussion of *Alroy* and Disraeli's use of Scripture.
[26] See Marvin Spevack, *Curiosities Revisited: The Works of Isaac D'Israeli* (Zurich, 2007). Isaac D'Israeli's notebooks containing Maimonides' tale of 'El Roi' can be found in Bodleian Library Dep. Hughenden 266/1. See Todd Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, pp. 122-3. Endelman has argued that Isaac and Benjamin were in the same house writing *Alroy* and *The Genius of Judaism* simultaneously.
[27] Isaac D'Israeli, *The Genius of Judaism* (London, 1833). For further discussion of this text, see Chapters 2 of this thesis.

Jews' relationship to the Christian nation emerged, with the foundation of *The London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews* in 1809, the institution of the first bishop of Jerusalem in 1841, and sustained debates in Parliament over Jews' ability to take up political office.[28] Heidi Kaufman and Michael Ledger-Lomas have both emphasized the delicate negotiation of Judaism by Christian thinkers – especially evangelicals who felt a mission to convert the Jews – in the mid-nineteenth century. As Ledger-Lomas has put it, 'much liberal Protestant or broad church thinking was devoted to establishing that true Christianity both inherited the promises of ancient Israel and totally broke with the Judaism of its time'.[29]

This is another area of intellectual and religious discussion from which both Isaac D'Israeli and Benjamin Disraeli are too often removed in their histories and biographies, when in fact, both wrote extensively about the Jews' place in a Christian nation.[30] *The Genius of Judaism* and *Alroy* were texts about nationhood, and the vital and remedial role of cohesive religious faith and practice to the health of the nation. Isaac and Benjamin each interrogated the extent to which a unified bodypolitik must necessarily weld its religious and political identities. The Jews offered the prototypical example of such a religious nation. *The Genius of Judaism* and *Alroy* emphasized this fundamental characteristic of the Jewish people: the deep connection between their religion and polity. D'Israeli claimed that this theocratic principle 'cause[d] the separation of the Israelite from all the generations of mankind'. The Jews remained a unique people because there was absolutely no separation between their religious laws and their civil laws; in D'Israeli's words, 'By this miraculous interposition of Providence

[28] See W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, From 1809 to 1908* (London, 1908). See also Donald Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge, 2010) and Michael Darby, *The Emergence of the Hebrew Christian Movement in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Leiden, 2010).
[29] Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Evangelical Protestants, Jews and the Epistle to the Hebrews in mid-nineteenth-century Britain', *Jewish Historical Studies* 47 (2016), p. 71. Heidi Kaufman, *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel: Reflections on a Nested Nation* (Pennsylvania, 2009), pp. 4-5.
[30] For an exception, see Stuart Peterfreund, 'Identity, Diaspora, and the Secular Voice in the Works of Isaac D'Israeli' in Sheila A. Spector (ed.), *The Jews and British Romanticism: Politics, Religion, Culture* (New York, 2005), pp. 127-47. See also Stuart Peterfreund, 'Not for "Antiquaries", but for "Philosophers": Isaac D'Israeli's Talmudic Critique and His Talmudical Way with Literature' in Spector (ed.), *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature* (New York, 2002), pp. 179-96.

the laws of this people constitute their religion; a legal ordinance became a moral duty; the civil order from that moment was bound up with the ecclesiastical'.[31] The enduring distinctiveness of the Jews, D'Israeli argued, was 'the divine institution of their religion'.[32] This lent the Jews a permanent cohesion and separated them from the 'laws of other legislators [which] have passed away, [because] their views were transient', and because 'there was no holy principle in them of enduring potency'. By contrast, D'Israeli claimed, 'the laws of Moses – unaltered as they were first delivered to his race . . . and binding together the spirit of religion with the spirit of polity – after countless ages are now operating on their unchangeable people, still ancient and still our contemporaries!'[33] The reviewer William Cook Taylor noticed this emphasis in the works of the Disraelis. After Isaac's death in 1848, Taylor wrote in *Bentley's Miscellany* that father and son shared 'a common element which almost unconsciously moulded their character and predestined their career, and that element was compounded of a reverence amounting to enthusiasm for the theocracy of Judah'.[34]

In his extensive notes on the works of Moses Maimonides, the famous twelfth-century rabbi, D'Israeli transcribed tales of Israelites who were scattered in Muslim-ruled lands, and often forced to convert. The notebook containing legend of David El Roi – Disraeli's source for *Alroy* – focused on the cohesive fabric of the Jews' civic and religious identities, which kept them robust even while they lived in captivity:

> In the twelfth century, the Hebrew people were numerous in the East; and by the peculiarity of their situation, as well as by their own insulating customs, appeared to retain an independent state amidst their conquerors . . .
> But it was the supernatural influences of their ancient Religion which had preserved the solitary unity of this 'Kingdom of Priests' far more permanently than the transient interests of political cabinets, Emperor Soldon, and Caliph had sometimes attempted to melt down this 'peculiar people' into the ways of their population, but the Soveriegns of the Earth, who had raised the foundations of the Jewish temple, in vain had wrestled with the genius of Judaism![35]

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[31] Isaac D'Israeli, *The Genius of Judaism* (London, 1833), pp. 20-1.
[32] Ibid., p. 16.
[33] Ibid., pp. 20-1.
[34] W.C. Taylor, 'The Late Isaac D'Israeli, Esq., and the Genius of Judaism', *Bentley's Miscellany, 1837-1868*, 23 (Jan. 1848), p. 219.
[35] Hughenden MSS 266/1 9/III/9.

These questions – to what extent should religious peoples and institutions remain 'separate'? – should appear unmistakably salient in a decade in which debates over the role of ecclesiastical institutions in society dominated public and civil concerns. The political polemics of the 1830s and 1840s were dominated by two questions which closely related to the notion of 'Jewish theocracy' and the connection between creed and polity. In J.P. Ellens' words, these questions were, 'should public affairs remain based on a religious footing, in continuity with a millennium of tradition, or be reconstituted on a desacralized basis?' and similarly, '[was] the state divinely instituted, with a transcendent mandate and objective, or [was] it founded solely in contract and confined to temporal concerns'?[36] The Ecclesiastical Commission established by acts of Parliament in 1835-6 attested to the priority of reforming the Church and re-negotiating ecclesiastical authority in the wake of both Catholic Emancipation and the 1832 Reform Act. This national review of religious institutions extended beyond the Church of England and dissenting Christian denominations. The same reforming energies exercised influence in the Jewish community in Britain, which in 1835 established the Board of Deputies of British Jews, recognized by the government as the official representation of Jewish interests in Britain.[37] The Board aimed to protect the legal status of Jewish religious practice in Britain, with the main aim of achieving Jewish emancipation.

On its heels came the foundation of the first Reform Synagogue in Britain in 1841. As many ecclesiastical communities found themselves at the cross roads of orthodoxy and reform, so did the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish congregation in London. A group within the congregation addressed the Yahidim (the legislative body within the community) with suggestions for reform of the liturgy which sought to move the congregation towards a less orthodox and more inclusive Jewish body, while preserving the core spirit of prayer and

[36] J.P. Ellens, *Religious Routes to Gladstonian Liberalism: The Church Rate Conflict in England and Wales, 1832-1868* (Pennsylvania, 1994), p. 5.
[37] See Aubrey Newman, *The Board of Deputies of British Jews 1760-1985: A Brief Survey* (London, 1987). See also Lipman and Vivian David, 'Board of Deputies of British Jews', in Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (eds.), *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. (2nd ed., vol. 4., Detroit, 2007) *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. See also Jonathan G. Campbell, 'The Jewish Community in Britain' in Gilley and Sheil (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain*, pp. 427-48.

retaining the identity of Israelites. The Reformers' letter to the elders announcing their foundation of a new Reform Synagogue centered on the question of national and religious identity. They specified that in order to 'familiarize the rising generation, with a knowledge of the great principles of our holy faith – to teach them their duty as Israelites, and as men', they would ensure that 'religious discourses delivered in the English language, will form part of the morning service on every Sabbath and Holiday'.[38]

These reforms represented a pivotal moment in Anglo-Jewish identity. As Geoffrey Alderman has argued, the seceders 'were united less in a conscious wish to establish a new species of Judaism, doctrinally different from that into which they had been born, than by a desire to have sole charge of a place of worship'.[39] Both Alderman and Robert Liberles have shown that, rather than wishing to disrupt the Jewish religious tradition of their childhoods, the reformers responded to common political issues about leadership within the community. The new Reform community wanted to be identified by their religion and by their country: they wanted to be British Jews.

> One of the benefits anticipated by us from the establishment, we are forming is, that the junction of members of different congregations to which we have already adverted, will lead to the abolition of the useless distinction now existing in relation to those who are termed Portuguese and German Jews, but who, in fact, are neither Portuguese nor Germans but natives, and in many instances descendants of natives of the British Empire, and we have, accordingly, given the intended place of worship, the designation of 'West London Synagogue of British Jews'.[40]

By establishing this new national identity, the reformers sought to protect their religious seriousness in a changing public and national space. They emphasized that they were not breaking away from the parent synagogue for the purpose of schism or conflict, but rather,

> through a sincere conviction that substantial improvements in the public worship are essential to the weal of our sacred religion, and that they will be the means of handing down to our children, and to our children's children; our holy faith in all its purity and integrity.

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[38] 'To the Gentlemen Elders of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue' in Gerald Parsons, (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain: Sources* (vol 3., Manchester, 1988), p. 484.
[39] Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford, 1998), p. 36. See also Robert Liberles, 'The Origins of the Jewish Reform Movement in England', *Association of Jewish Studies Review*, I (1976), pp. 121-50.
[40] *Ibid*.

> Indeed, we are firmly convinced, that their tendency will be to arrest, and prevent *secession from Judaism – an overwhelming* evil, which has at various times so widely spread among many of the most respectable families of our communities . . . so that henceforth no 'Israelite born', may cease to exclaim, 'Hear, O! Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one!'[41]

The ancient dilemma of Jewish nationhood and identity felt remarkably proximate in nineteenth-century Britain. Disraeli would have been well aware of these reforms in the Jewish community, and the manner in which they echoed questions of church reform in the 1830s and 1840s. The Jewish reformers' use of Deuteronomy 6 ('Hear, O! Israel') shows the immediacy of biblical language in articulating modern religious pleas; indeed, it was not dissimilar to Disraeli's use of Scripture in *Alroy* ('O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!' from Matthew and Luke being one of many examples).[42]

Thus it comes as no coincidence that Disraeli's writing in this period investigated the potency of religious practice, and religious law, in shaping individuals, leaders, and nations, and imagined a society still contained within a biblical narrative of exile and redemption. The unity between Church and State inherent in ancient Judaism became, for Disraeli, the prototype for the healthy nation, which adheres strictly to the mandates of its traditional institutions. His arguments for a unified Church and State in the debates throughout his by-elections of the 1830s caused Disraeli to bring his religious and scriptural reading in his father's library into the fore of public debate. He summoned his sister to send his Bible once more in 1835, and told her that he was reading 'a pamphlet on Church Reform by "a disciple of Seldon"', referring to a work by Henry Richard Vassall (third Baron Holland) called *Parliamentary Talk, or the Objections to the Late Irish Church Bill*.[43] In the pamphlet, Holland – who had supported Catholic Emancipation and lobbied for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts for over twenty years before it was carried – rebuked those who objected to the relief of Irish church rates, and their re-appropriation for secular purposes. He particularly took to task the notion that this re-appropriation would be 'sacrilegious', asking,

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[41] *Ibid*., p. 485.
[42] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 13-15. See Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 23:37; Luke 12:34.
[43] Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 12 Jan 1836, *BDL* vol. ii, pp. 137-8.

'by what text of Scripture, by what injunction or revelation of God, or by what principle of natural religion or morality, [are] Princes, Potentates, or States . . . precluded from making such distribution of their territories and wealth'?[44] That Disraeli should have his Bible next to him while reading Holland's pamphlet illustrates the extent to which he participated in an arena of ecclesiastical debate that remained invested in biblical enunciations of public morality.

Arguments such as Lord Holland's represented the dangerous erastianism that John Keble decried in his famous sermon on 'National Apostasy' in Oxford in 1833, a message that resulted in one of the most important movements in nineteenth-century British religious thought and affected Disraeli's career immeasurably.[45] As Simon Skinner has shown, Tractarian polemics expanded well beyond the confines of Oxford pulpits. Defining the character of the Church of England, both for clerics and Members of Parliament, had become a political project: a constitutional discussion as much as a theological one. Religion had become, in Skinner's words, 'the currency of political discourse'.[46] Disraeli exchanged in this currency to a much greater extent, and with much more investment in the religious issues at play, than scholars have allowed. Just as he had portrayed the Israelites in *Alroy*, in his political rhetoric he represented England as a religiously-ordained entity, and the Constitution as a sacred text. Under the political patronage of Lord Lyndhurst (1772-1863), the ultra-conservative lawyer and peer, Disraeli wrote *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835) in which he described the Constitution at a tipping point, and the nation as locked in a cosmic narrative comparable to biblical Israel's: battling between the forces of progress and

[44] Henry Richard Vassall, *Parliamentary Talk, or the Objections to the Late Irish Church Bill, Considered in a Letter, to a Friend Abroad, by a Disciple of Lord Seldon* (London, 1836), p. 12.
[45] For recent studies of the Oxford Movement, see James Pereiro, *Ethos and the Oxford Movement: At the Heart of Tractarianism* (Oxford, 2008) and *Theories of Development in the Oxford Movement* (Leominster, 2015); see Stewart J. Brown and Peter Nockles (eds.), *The Oxford Movement: Europe and the Wider World 1830-1930* (Cambridge, 2012). For the late eighteenth-century contexts, see Peter Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship 1760-1857* (Cambridge, 1994).
[46] S.A. Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England': the social and political thought of the Oxford movement* (Oxford, 2004), p. 18.

tradition. He likened England to ancient civilizations in crisis, such as the mythical civilization which Alroy attempted to return to their Promised Land:

> There are great crises in the fortunes of an ancient people, which impel them to examine the nature of the institutions which have gradually sprung up among them. In this great national review, duly and wisely separating the essential character of their history from that which is purely adventitious, they discover certain principles of ancestral conduct, which they acknowledge as the causes that these institutions have flourished and descended to them . . . they resolve that these principles shall be their guides and their instructors.[47]

This idea of the nation informed Disraeli's Young England writings in the 1840s. In *Tancred* (1847) the hero embarks on his 'new crusade' because he perceives "'that I am born in an age and in a country divided between infidelity on one side and an anarchy of creeds on the other; with none competent to guide me'".[48] His return, in language and action, to the crusades shows his desire to reclaim, and reopen the religious narrative of the past: 'yet feeling that I must believe, for I hold that duty cannot exist without faith; is it so wild as some would think it, I would say is it unreasonable, that I should wish to do that which, six centuries ago, was done by my ancestor whose name I bear, and that I should cross the seas?'"[49]

For Disraeli, the British Constitution existed as an extension of the ancient and medieval worlds; it bound the present country to its past. Like the Jewish theocratic principle, the Constitution was divinely instated. He illustrated this in *Alroy*, in which the Israelite nation only succeeded in effective statehood when it adhered to its religious laws as they were set out to Moses in the Old Testament. Similarly, only the English constitution as it stood, categorically fused with the Church, could practically hold together conflicting ideological forces in society. In Disraeli's words, the constitution ensured 'the compatibility of sectarian toleration and national orthodoxy'.[50] This was how he explained his defense of the exclusivity of the Church of England to the electors of Maidstone in a speech of July 1837. He emphasized

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[47] Benjamin Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution* (London, 1835), p. 16.
[48] Disraeli, *Tancred*, pp. 122-3.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 209.

the mitigation between orthodoxy and pragmatism that constituted the main theme of *Alroy* and *The Young Duke*:

> Convinced that the reformed Religion, as by Law established, in this Country, is at the same time the best guarantee for religious Toleration and orthodox Purity, I feel it my duty to uphold the Rights of our National Church, that illustrious Institution to which we are not less indebted for our civil than for our spiritual Liberties.[51]

His position on the crucial interconnectedness between polity and religious inheritance would not have been dissimilar from Gladstone's, before the latter's *volte-face* in 1845. In *The State in its Relations with the Church* (1838), Gladstone advocated a welded Church-State identity, in which the Church provided the moral consciousness for the character of the nation.[52] While Gladstone's realization that a pure confessional state could no longer be achieved in England eventually led him to vote in favour of the increase of the Maynooth Grant in 1845, Disraeli made the same plea for the Church as the best guarantor of both the sacred character of the State, and also the sectarian flexibility of its people, a relativism which Disraeli continued to protect throughout his fiction and political writing, especially in the 1870s. His novel *Lothair* featured a protagonist who learns to prioritize a broad and inclusive faith over sectarian difference. Disraeli wanted the polity to know that religious freedom and orthodoxy could exist in England alone, through the delicate religious balance achieved by the constitution. It is telling, however, that historians have never drawn this comparison to Gladstone's church politics in the 1830s; it certainly does not fit into the typical constructions of Disraeli and Gladstone.

Disraeli became MP for Maidstone in 1837, entering into a parliamentary atmosphere in which debates surrounding church reform gained new vigour in the early 1840s and came to their apex in the controversy over the Maynooth Grant in 1845. The principles of a Jewish

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[51] *BDL*, ii, p. 278, Disraeli to the Freemen and Electors of Maidstone, 1 Jul. 1837.
[52] See W.E. Gladstone, *The State in its Relation with the Church* (4th edn, Farnborough, 1969). See also Deryck Schreuder, 'Gladstone and the Conscience of the State', in Peter Marsh (ed.), *The Conscience of the Victorian State* (Syracuse, 1979) and Perry Butler, *Gladstone: Church, State, and Tractarianism – A Study of His Religious Ideas and Attitudes, 1809-1859* (Oxford, 1982). See also Boyd Hilton, 'Gladstone's Theological Politics', in Michael Bentley and John Stevenson, (eds.), *High and Low Politics in Modern Britain* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 28-57.

theocracy, manifested in an English confessional state, became the central themes of Disraeli's Young England trilogy, and also explained his position against the Maynooth Grant.[53] The religious ideas that Disraeli had articulated in his early fiction – the connection between religious and civil duty in ancient Jewish thought that he expressed in *Alroy*, and relatedly, the purity of Roman Catholic devotion and mysticism in *The Young Duke* – accorded easily with the vision of Young England. These novels had suggested that Judaism and Catholicism each provided an unbroken link with pure religious civilizations: biblical Israelites and medieval Catholics. In *Coningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845), and *Tancred* (1847), Disraeli cried for a return to these ancient religious worlds. He expressed the political and social grievances of the 1840s as the corollaries of religious negligence, and of the nation's betrayal of the sacred union between faith and civil duty. The novels' heroes – respectively Coningsby, Egremont, and Tancred – each delay the immediate gains of a seat in Parliament in order to search for the religious morality that they view as a prerequisite to governance. Conversely, the characters who hastily enter Parliament are satirized and set up as deliberate foils for the hero. An England restored to religious piety and universality – as Tancred puts it, a nation that 'recover[s] its primeval and divine supremacy' – would never suffer the social ills that plague it under the new system.[54]

Recent scholarship on the Young England trilogy, however, has focused on the political, social, and psychological purchase of each novel. This has been especially apparent in analyses of *Sybil* (1845). Robert O'Kell, for example, turned away from the question posed by other historians, about whether or not *Sybil* reflects an accurate reading of English history, or whether it actually promoted concrete social solutions. Instead, he argued that 'in writing *Sybil* Disraeli was much more importantly attempting to write propaganda in the form of allegorical romance'.[55] O'Kell paid more attention to the religious politics within the novel

[53] See James Pereiro, 'The Reformation and the Principles of the English Constitution in Disraeli's "Young England" Novels' in Peter Nockles (ed.), *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library: Reinventing the Reformation in the Nineteenth Century: A Cultural History*, 90:1 (2014), pp. 323-44.
[54] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 441; bk. 6, ch. 4.
[55] Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), p. 257; see also pp. 256-79.

than previous scholars; he claimed, for example, that other scholars emphasized 'the ostensible realism of class distinction' at the expense of 'the central religious allegory' of the novel.[56] Yet O'Kell's reading treated the religious themes as subsidiary, and ultimately a species of, the larger 'allegorical romance' at play in Disraeli's fiction. Rather than viewing the religious ideas within the novel as existential lines of inquiry, or expressions of belief, O'Kell viewed some of them as 'parodic elements, which in effect are illustrations of the antithetical, or Satanic, view of society'.[57]

David Cesarani described *Sybil* as 'a novel that combined history and social comment with propaganda, loosely held together by a melodramatic plot'.[58] He interpreted *Sybil* as a social work, in which 'salvation for the workers will come from above: the aristocracy'; but Cesarani perceived no connection between this social salvation and its bedfellow in the novel: religious salvation. Indeed, Cesarani took *Sybil* as further evidence that Disraeli cared little for actual Judaism; he claimed, 'only someone who did not take Jewish history seriously or felt little connection with the plight of Jews in previous eras could hark back to medievalism in the way Disraeli did', because the medieval period was more hostile and intolerant to Jewish communities.[59]

When we look closely at the Young England novels, however, we see that they comprise not merely a collection of Disraeli's literary devices, but that they focused on the broken connection between the nation and God. Further, Cesarani's claim about Disraeli's misunderstanding of Jewish history overlooks the point that Disraeli proposed that the best way to regain the connection was to reanimate England's connection to Judaism (in *Coningsby* and *Tancred*) and Roman Catholicism (in *Sybil*). This religious vision found a connection to the feudal-like relationships between the landed gentry and workers in the Middle Ages, in the case of the Roman Catholic Church, but also functioned separately in the case of Judaism.

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[56] *Ibid*., p. 273. Cf. Daniel Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction* (London, 1979), pp. 111-20 and Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), pp. 97-100.
[57] O'Kell, *Disraeli*, p. 271.
[58] David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (New Haven, 2016), p. 103.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 104.

Disraeli did not call for a return to the medieval social status of Jews in a literal sense; rather, he called for a renewed simplicity between people and God, which was encapsulated for him both in the Jewish theocracy and the medieval church.

Further, in crafting these texts Disraeli participated in a wider generic backlash to, in Boyd Hilton's words, 'natural theology, Newtonian natural philosophy, and Lockean epistemology'.[60] What he perceived as the dreaded rise of 'political economy' and the principles of utilitarianism, which he had decried in *Vindication*, were also called into question in a deluge of other texts from the period which demonstrate a widespread longing for the simplicity and moral purity of the medieval world, in everything from religious thought to economy. These texts range from the *Tracts for the Times* (1834-41) and Carlyle's *Chartism* (1839), to the new journal established by the Cambridge Camden Society, *The Ecclesiologist*, which set out to rebuild dilapidated churches in the medieval Gothic style in an attempt to revitalize the Church of England in its age of seeming decline. John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, two central members of the 'Ecclesiologists' typified the attitude of nineteenth-century medievalism when they described the difference between medieval and modern structures: 'old buildings—the mellowing power of time—the evident antiquity of surround objects—the natural beauties of foliage, moss, and icy, that require centuries to reach perfection—[and] on the other hand, the bareness, the newness, nay even the sharpness and the vigour of new work'.[61] In Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *North and South* (1854), the character Margaret Hale expresses a similar disillusionment with the state of society in the industrial northern town to which she moves. She finds that 'everything looked more "purpose-like". The country carts had more iron, and less wood and leather about the horse-gear; the people in the streets, although on pleasure bent, had yet a busy mind. The colours looked greyer – more enduring, not so gay and pretty'.[62]

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[60] Boyd Hilton, 'The politics of anatomy and an anatomy of politics c. 1825-1850' in Collini, Whatmore, and Young (eds.), *History, Religion, and Culture: British Intellectual History 1750-1950*, p. 194.
[61] John Mason Neale and Benjamin Webb, *The Symbolism of Churches and Church Ornaments* (Leeds, 1843), p. xix.
[62] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (1855; London, 2015), p. 68.

In participating in this neo-medieval literary discourse, Disraeli emphasized the same values that he had explored in his fiction in the 1830s, particularly the especial virtue of Jewish civil and religious law. In *Coningsby* he presented the Jewish theocracy as the original form of political and religious conservatism: Sidonia famously claims, 'the Jews, Coningsby, are essentially Tories. Toryism, indeed, is but copied from the mighty prototype which has fashioned Europe'.[63] Coningsby realizes that such a fusion between creed and nation begets political concord, and could assuage social and industrial agitation,

> 'The character of the Church is universality . . . Once the Church in this country was universal in principle and practice; when wedded to the State, it continued at least universal in principle, if not in practice. What is it now? All ties between the State and the Church are abolished, except those which tend to its danger and degradation'.[64]

The Church's universal character – an English theocracy, in the form of an English confessional state – created a political space and a class system in which inequality could be explained and mitigated by God's plan for the nation. In *Sybil,* the protagonist Charles Egremont locates the beginning of England's social strife at the Reformation, when the nation lost its unified and universal religious and social code. At the beginning of the novel, Egremont receives word that the ill-treated agricultural workers on his brother's estate have staged a revolt, burning stacks of crop in protest at their dismal working conditions. Egremont seeks wisdom in the ruins of Marney Abbey, the ancient monastic ruins on his property. He perceives a connection between the loss of the unified religious duty of the medieval monks, and the social discord that disrupts the present:

> Why was England not the same land as in the days of his light-hearted youth? Why were these hard times for the poor? Were there any rick-burners in the times of the lord abbots? And if not, why not? And why should the stacks of the Earls of Marney be destroyed, and those of the abbots of Marney spared? [65]

Egremont realises that the abbots of Marney adhered to an inclusive social code that has vanished at the hands of traitorous landowners who turned their backs on the implicit

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[63] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 219.
[64] *Ibid*., pp. 312-3.
[65] Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil; Or the Two Nations*, ed. Sheila M. Smith, (Oxford, 1981), pp. 59, 57.

religious law of the land. The abbots created an institution 'where the traveler, from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim, asked the shelter and the succor that never were denied'.[66] Only from the philosophical assumption that God had ordered civilization according to a celestial pattern could individuals adopt their place without agitation; as the righteous vicar Aubrey St. Lys says, 'for there, in the presence of God, all were brethren'.[67]

In so expressing the connection between religious duty and political stewardship, Disraeli was in conversation with the Tractarian literature of the 1840s, in which, in Simon Skinner's words, 'theological principle dovetailed with social inclination'.[68] In his *Ideal of a Christian Church*, written in defence of the *British Critic* and Newman's Tract 90 in 1843, W.G. Ward had articulated the specific duties of the Church 'in her relations to the poor' and to 'the rich'. In Ward's text, biblical interpretations of the virtues of poverty and the evils of wealth found a practical illustration in the social context of nineteenth-century England. As Ward argued, 'When the moral tone of the country is unchristianized, it is all one whether the poor are serfs by law, or citizens by law'. The growing gap between the rich and poor was a religious injustice; in Ward's words, it 'enfeebl[es] us in all our efforts to benefit the poor or spread the Gospel, so crushing to all growth of Christian perfection'.[69]

In *Tancred*, the final work of the trilogy, Disraeli went further in expressing that only through religious revelation, rather than a legislative re-thinking of Church-State relations, could the nation hope to restore itself. Tancred travels to the Holy Land to seek political and religious salvation. The 'Angel of Arabia' appears to the Moses-like Tancred atop Mount Sinai and imparts on him a new kind of law: the '"sublime and solacing doctrine of theocratic equality"'; or the idea that the '"equality of man can only be accomplished by the sovereignty of God"'.[70] The novel conveys this as the next stage in a religious metanarrative that will determine England's political and religious destiny: '"It was decreed that, when [the races of

[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid., p. 111.
[68] Skinner, *Tractarians and the 'Condition of England'*, pp. 23, 265.
[69] W.G. Ward, *The Ideal of a Christian Church considered in comparison with existing practice* (London, 1844), pp. 31-35.
[70] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 300; bk. 4, ch. 7.

Christendom] burst from their wild woods, the Arabian principles should meet them on the threshold of the old world to guide and civilise them".[71]

This belief in a fundamental synthesis between State and Church, and its resemblance to the Jewish theocracy, which Disraeli expressed persistently, from *Alroy* in 1833 to the Young England fiction in the 1840s, can help explain Disraeli's opposition to the Maynooth Grant in 1845. The nation as an extension of a biblical metanarrative was not confined to the pages of his novels. His explanation of this decision to the electors of Buckinghamshire in a speech of May 1847 included the major religious messages of his books: he emphasized the ideological tug-of-war in which he saw the nation locked, and claimed that only a return to a kind of theocracy,[72]

> secured to us the blessings alike of orthodoxy and of religious freedom. For these, among other reasons, I thought it my duty to oppose, in 1845, the Grant to the College of Maynooth, leading, as it inevitably and avowedly did, to the endowment of the priesthood of another Church. I see no reason to regret the opposition which I offered to that measure, and I hold it to be quite consistent with an earnest desire to secure to our Roman Catholic fellow subjects, the civil and political equality to which they are entitled. In the great struggle between popular principles and liberal opinions, which is the characteristic of our age, I hope ever to be found on the side of the people, and of the Institutions, of England.[73]

This reasoning found a place in a wider articulation of the importance of an established national church. Thomas Chalmers' lectures on the subject used biblical history to show that Christianity should not be traded as a commodity in a marketplace: it must be instituted by the State.[74] Disraeli participated in this reimagining of England according to a renewed vision of it as a Christian nation. As Allen Warren has shown, Disraeli 'offered a political and constitutional framework which linked the established Church to the historic identity of the

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[71] Ibid., p. 299; bk. 4, ch. 7.
[72] I do not refer to a literal 'theocracy' in which priests govern the State; I refer rather to Disraeli's conception of the Jewish theocracy as he applied it to his arguments in favour of a confessional state, and in his arguments, like those of the Tractarians, against the ideological notion of 'erastianism'.
[73] *BDL*, iv, p. 282, Disraeli to the Electors of Buckinghamshire, 22 May 1847.
[74] See Thomas Chalmers, *Lectures on the Establishment and Extension of National Churches* (Glasgow, 1838), especially pp. 17-31.

English nation'.[75] A panoramic, broadly unified religious creed, held together by the State Church, offered the most sensible way forward in an age of intellectual gridlock.

Disraeli's 'earnest desire' to ensure the liberties of Roman Catholics hinted at his broader ideas about religious sects outside of the Church of England. His notion of 'theocratic equality' demanded that all faiths, especially the venerable and ancient ones like Judaism and Catholicism, should cohere with the Church of England in a manner which promoted national unity. In the same year that he published *Tancred,* Disraeli spoke in the House of Commons – as a young member who had been thrust to the head of the Conservative party over the Corn Laws debate – in support of the Jewish Relief Bill that would allow Baron Lionel de Rothschild and other Jews to sit in Parliament. The debate over Catholic Emancipation in 1829 and the subsequent question of ecclesiastical reform in the 1830s and 1840s came to a head for the Jews in December 1847. Historians have treated Disraeli's speech as a spontaneous and bizarre assertion of Jewish superiority, but when placed in the lineage of his religious writings from the 1830s, the speech remains entirely consistent with the concept of religious wholeness that Disraeli promoted throughout his early fiction and political polemics.[76] Rather than treading cautiously on his party's line of religious toleration and liberty, Disraeli made clear, 'I am one of those who believe that there is something more excellent than religious liberty – and that more excellent thing is religious truth'.[77] Re-articulating the theology of *Tancred*, Disraeli argued that there was a complete theological unity between Judaism and Christianity. If pursued correctly, he argued, both creeds were inherently disposed to uphold the tenets of the Constitution and the principle of theocratic equality. He emphasized the sameness of Christians and Jews, claiming that Jews 'acknowledge the same God as the Christian people of this realm' and 'acknowledge the same divine revelation as yourselves'.[78] The religious righteousness of the Jews, rather than the

[75] Allen Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives and the National Church, 1837-1881', *Parliamentary History* 19:1 (2000), p. 97.
[76] See Blake, *Disraeli*, pp. 258-61. Cf. Todd Endelman '"A Hebrew to the end": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, pp. 124-5.
[77] *Hansard*, 16 Dec. 1847, vol. 95 c. 1322.
[78] *Ibid.*, c. 1323.

principle of toleration, formed the thrust of Disraeli's argument; he claimed that, it 'is entirely on religious grounds and on religious principles that I venture to recommend the subject to your notice. If I do so with earnestness, I hope I may be pardoned'.[79] In thus framing his argument, Disraeli not only pressed for Jewish Emancipation; he called for the renewed importance of religious truth to public affairs. He insisted that religious truth, rather than liberal principles, should continue to determine parliamentary decisions and the political course of the nation.

This was a reckless ideology to deploy to a House full of evangelicals such as Robert Inglis, MP for Oxford University, who claimed, 'If the House be prepared to sanction this principle, let the country know it, let our constituents be told that we throw to the winds all the securities which we possess for even the nominal profession of the Gospel'.[80] Disraeli remained at a delicate moment in his political career. What could have motivated him, in a highly scrutinized political debate, at moment when he had everything to lose in the parliamentary arena, to take this line of argument? The answer lies in this lineage of religious reading, study, and writing from the early 1830s. The only possible incentive for so radically departing from the rhetorical thrust of the wider debate in favour of his own theological construction, was that through careful preparation, Disraeli was convinced he had landed on a robust ideology. He deepened the same argument in 'Chapter 24' of his biography of his deceased friend and colleague Lord George Bentinck, published in 1852. His message remained identical, and similarly influenced by biblical narratives, to those religious arguments he made in his early fiction and in the Jewish Relief speech in 1847. In *Lord George Bentinck* he again asserted the fundamental Jewishness of Christianity, invoking a self-reasoned Trinitarian theology, in which 'There cannot be two moralities' and claimed that Christ 'could teach a different morality from that which had been already revealed by the First

[79] *Ibid*., c. 1330.
[80] *Ibid*., cc. 1253-5.

Person of the Holy Trinity, is a dogma so full of terror that it may perhaps be looked upon as the ineffable sin against the Holy Spirit'.[81]

If such attempts at theology from Disraeli seem bizarre, it is important to reemphasize that public discourse in the mid-nineteenth century was theologically diverse, contentious, and fertile, and that intense and immediate debates over morality, scripture, doctrine, and the state's role in governing any of it, played out with remarkable frequency. The Religious Census of 1851 showed the huge diversity of devotional and ecclesiastical practice by the middle of the century.[82] While many issues centred around the Anglican Church, it was realised that relatively speaking, the Church represented fewer and fewer religious interests, as varying states of industry and social movement across the country complicated the religious landscape. Not only did the Church confront political questions about its establishment and increasing dissent, but Christianity at large confronted the rise of textual criticism, as well as changes in physical, anthropological, and economic science, all of which mandated a reappraisal of theological and scriptural truths. The diversity of thought even within the Church of England exhibited itself in the 'Gorham Judgment' of 1850. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ruled that George Gorham, who was tried by Henry Phillpotts for his evangelical views on the symbolic, rather than the literally transformative work of baptism, was allowed to take up his living in Devon. The ruling was based on the Committee's statement that with respect to the Thirty-Nine Articles 'it would have been impossible . . . to employ language which did not admit of some latitude of interpretation' and that consequently, 'those who agree to them are entitled to such latitude or diversity of interpretation as the same form admits'.[83] This both reflected the fertility of interpretation already underway, and opened the door for further debate. Three years later in 1853 F.D.

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[81] Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck* (London, 1905), p. 316. This text is discussed at length in Chapter 4.
[82] Sheridan Gilley, 'The Church of England in the Nineteenth Century' in Gilley and W.J. Sheils (eds.), *A History of Religion in Britain: Practice and Belief from pre-Roman Times to the Present* (Oxford, 1994), p. 293. For a comprehensive study of the Census, see Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*. See also Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (2 vols., New Haven, 1972), and James C. Livingston, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: Challenges and Reconceptions* (London, 2007).
[83] 'The Gorham Judgment, 1850' in Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain,* iii, p. 15-6.

Maurice was dismissed from his post at King's College, London, for questioning the literal truth of the doctrine of eternal damnation.[84]

This environment of theological controversy, and especially rise of science and its impact on biblical criticism and theology, acted centrally in Disraeli's ideological assertions from the 1840s to the 1870s. While scholars have never portrayed Disraeli as an activist within this scene of religious debate and scandal, it becomes more important that Disraeli considered himself an actor in this very arena. After he was appointed to office in February 1852, he wrote to the Revd William Partridge (1809-86), vicar of Ilmer, Bucks, to describe the opposition he received from Anglican clergy who found his theology in Chapter 24 of *Bentinck* heretical. Citing Augustine, Jerome, Tertullian, and of course, the Bible, Disraeli made his case to Partridge.

> . . . I am told, that there is a sort of movement among a certain section of the clergy of the county against me on the ground of objection to certain passages in my late work. My belief is that there is no statement, or sentiment, in that book at variance with the creeds & articles of that Church of wh: I am not only a faithful, but, I trust, devoted child - but it is said that there are some expressions, wh:, tho' not coming under the head of matters contained in creeds & articles, are still unsound. With great deference, I wd. observe, that there is not an opinion put forth in the chapter in question, on the subjects of the Crucifixion & Atonement for example, for wh: there is not the highest authority next to the Holy Scriptures & the creeds & articles. For instance, the only sentence, wh: I have seen definitely disapproved of is a mere reproduction of St Augustin [*sic*] when typically treating the sacrifice of Isaac; the very phrase 'preordained victim & immolators' is from Tertullian; & all that I have said of the world being indebted for Xtianity to the Jewish Race is constantly the theme of St. Jerome. Wishing to treat a difficult theme in a popular, & not in a pedantic, manner, I avoided an ostentatious reference to patristic lore, assuming that the clergy in general wd. be acquainted with these authorities wh: in many instances I have found to be the case. That such a work shd. be described as 'infidel' is very singular - it may be heretical, or thought so by those not sufficiently informed, or erroneously religious, but that it is eminently a religious work, I unequivocally maintain.[85]

Here was Disraeli, if not exactly enmeshed in public controversy to the degree of Gorham or Maurice, nevertheless defending his interpretation of the atonement and crucifixion and

[84] *Ibid*., pp. 19-25. See Jeremy Morris, *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford, 2008).
[85] *BDL*, vi, pp. 23-4, Disraeli to William Partridge, 25 Feb. 1852.

seeking Partridge's advice on how to make peace with the clerics who opposed him. The year before, in January 1851, Edward Stanley wrote in his diary that Disraeli 'said to me once, incidentally, but with earnestness, that if he retired from politics in time enough, he should resume literature, and write the *Life of Christ* from a national point of view, intending it for a posthumous work'.[86] The comment was not as incidental as Stanley implied, for he recorded in his diary entry of 5-6 May 1853 that he dined with Disraeli, who talked again of 'retiring from affairs, of writing an epic poem, and a life of Christ from the national point of view'.[87] Stanley recalled that Disraeli 'has a good library' and that in their 'philosophical discussion[s] of religious questions', they often conversed about 'the new German school of criticism [in which] I had perhaps read more than my friend, but his acquaintance with the earlier phases of the great controversy much exceeded mine'.[88] A picture begins to emerge of Disraeli steeped in the religious dilemmas of his day, not merely as a politician, but as a thinker.

Disraeli continued to pay close attention to developments in biblical criticism and theological controversy as they unfolded in the second half of the century. Stanley's comment about Disraeli's interest in theology is substantiated by the library at Hughenden, in which Disraeli had a wide collection of important texts from this period.[89] One can still find on the shelves De Wette's *On the Old Testament* (1806-7), Marcus Mortiz Kalisch's *Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament* (1858), Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua* (1864), William Jackson's *Doctrine of Retribution*, based on the 1875 Bampton Lectures, Renan's *Vie de Jésus,* (1863), and several works by Strauss, including George Eliot's translation of his *Life of Jesus* (1846). It is probable that Disraeli consulted these volumes as he crafted his novels and speeches, and as he conversed with colleagues like Stanley about religious change. In 1856 Disraeli wrote to his friend and religious correspondent, the Jewish-Anglican convert Sarah Brydges Willyams, to discuss developments in biblical criticism. As he would continue

[86] J.R. Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: The Political Journals of Lord Stanley 1849-69* (Sussex, 1978) p. 33.
[87] *Ibid*., pp. 106-7.
[88] *Ibid*., p. 31.
[89] See John Vincent, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 1990), p. 38.

to do often in the 1860s, he used language of betrayal or infidelity to describe scientific theories that sought to usurp religious understandings of creation.

> In the last number of the Quarterly Review, I shd. think about three or four months ago, there is an article on a work by a Revd. Mr Jowett, wh: will give you some idea of the rapid & strange advances, wh: German Neology, alias Infidelity, is making in that seat of venerable orthodoxy, the University of Oxford, & especially among clergymen of the Ch: of England.[90]

These 'rapid and strange advances' in critical theology tampered with Disraeli's vision of a harmonious quasi-theocratic agreement between Church and State. This was the same 'Revd. Mr Jowett' whose contribution to *Essays and Reviews* (1860) claimed that 'the time has come when it is no longer possible to ignore the results of criticism[;] it is of importance that Christianity should be seen to be in harmony with them'.[91] *Essays and Reviews* appeared just four months after Darwin published *On the Origin of the Species* in November 1859. For many, it felt like a Christian embrace of Darwinism. One of the essayists, Baden Powell, famously acclaimed 'a work [that] has now appeared by a naturalist of the most acknowledged authority, Mr Darwin's masterly volume'.[92] Controversies over the interpretation of Scripture reached another apex in 1862. Disraeli wrote to Willyams, 'The Church is much agitated by a book disputing the authenticity of the Pentateuch, & written by a Bishop – one Dr Colenso, a colonial Bishop. 'Tis a great scandal, & is almost as bad as Kings becoming Republicans'.[93] In this critical examination of the *Pentateuch* – a copy of which Disraeli had in the library at Hughenden – Colenso, inspired by the German critics he read, claimed that the factual errors in the first five books of the Bible rendered its theological claims open to scrutiny.

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[90] *BDL*, vi, p. 482, Disraeli to Sarah Brydges Willyams, 10 Apr. 1856.
[91] Benjamin Jowett, 'On the Interpretation of Scripture' in Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain,* iii, pp. 26-7.
[92] Powell, Baden, 'On the Study of the Evidences of Christianity', *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and its Readings*, Victor Shea and William Whitla (eds.) (Charlottesville, 2000), p. 258. See also Josef L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a Controversy: The Debate over Essays and Reviews, 1860-1864* (Aldershot, 1994).
[93] *BDL*, viii, pp. 225-6, Disraeli to Sarah Brydges Willyams, 23 Nov. 1862. See John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (London, 1862). For Colenso and the controversy, see Jeff Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the life of John Williams Colenso, 1814-1883* (Johannesburg, 1983). For Colenso's effect on wider theological debates, see Timothy Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Social and Political Context of Victorian Theology* (Waco, TX, 2004).

Given the height of public fervour surrounding these critical and scientific advances, it should not surprise us that in the 1860s, Disraeli embarked on a full-scale rebuttal of scientific materialism and a campaign in favour of a faithful nation and a robust Church-State alliance. As Allen Warren has shown, this campaign involved a friendship and alliance with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, a series of diocesan speeches supporting a robust and unified church, and movements for diocesan and parochial reform.[94] In these political activities, Disraeli continued to read and study theological texts. In 1861, Edward Bickersteth, Vicar of Aylesbury and Archdeacon of Buckinghamshire, sent Disraeli a letter on the subject of a diocesan meeting at which Disraeli was asked to take part, enclosing also a book. Bickersteth explained: 'In reference to our conversation last week I take the liberty of enclosing a copy of Dr Wordsworth's Lectures on the Interpretation of Scripture, in the first of which you will find views very similar to those which you so well expressed the other morning'.[95] Ideologically and intellectually, Disraeli belonged, like Christopher Wordsworth and Samuel Wilberforce, in the camp which produced *Replies to 'Essays and Reviews'* (1862). In a letter to Willyams of March 1861, he described the intellectual pandemonium in which he felt himself involved.

> An immense suspense in foreign affairs – but what questions! The temporal existence of the Pope: the union of the American states: the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire: the unity of Italy: each of them sufficient for a generation! It is a privilege to live in such an age – to say nothing of 'Essays & Reviews' which convulses Christendom, & seems to have shaken down the spire of Chichester Cathedral.[96]

Disraeli's excitement would turn more sombre. He wrote to Brydges again, in November of the same year, about the effects of *Essays and Reviews* controversy: 'The state of the Church is critical – from dissensions & heresy – among its own children. If it were to fall, philosophy would not profit: we should only be handed over to a narrow-minded and ignorant

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[94] See Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives and the National Church, 1837-1881', p. 96.
[95] *BDL*, viii, p. 145, Edward Bickersteth to Disraeli, 31 Jul. 1861. See Christopher Wordsworth, *On the Inspiration of Holy Scripture; or, On the Canon of the Old and New Testament* (London, 1851). Wordsworth would also go on to pen a rebuttal against Jowett's essay in *Essays and Reviews*; see E.M. Goulburn et. al., *Replies to 'Essays and Reviews'* (Oxford, 1862).
[96] *BDL* viii, pp. 102-3, Disraeli to Sarah Brydges Willyams, 16 Mar. 1861.

fanaticism'.[97] In the same letter, he reported to Brydges his alliance with the bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, 'as you know, a first-rate man,' and wrote that he would give a speech the following day at a Diocesan meeting in Aylesbury, to 'try to give a lead to public opinion in the right direction'. Disraeli clearly took this role seriously, likening himself to the early eighteenth-century preacher Henry Sacheverell, some of whose explosive sermons had to be burned: 'It is a nervous business, for what may be said, & done tomorrow, may produce very great effects – like Sacheverell's sermon, wh: was nothing till it was preached, & then nearly set the Thames on fire . . . Think of me tomorrow; a very critical day, I can assure you'.[98] Even Monypenny and Buckle, who largely showed little interest in Disraeli's confessional position, recognized that 'Disraeli was a rigid maintainer of orthodoxy in belief' and 'therefore held the speculations of Broad Churchmen in little favour'.[99]

The ensuing Aylesbury speech set nothing on fire, but it represented a pivotal moment in Disraeli's defence of the Church throughout the 1860s. *The Times* reported that the basis of Disraeli's 'Church in danger' logic was the threat of a 'new school of German theology . . . which with profound learning and inexorable logic proved that Rationalism was irrational (a laugh), and successfully substituted for it a new scheme of Scriptural interpretation called the mythical'.[100] Disraeli epitomized his 'Church in danger' cry in his 'Apes and Angels' speech, delivered in the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford nearly three years later, on 25 November 1864, which came as part of his same continued political alliance with Wilberforce and the diocese of Oxford. He famously claimed amid loud cheers, that in the debate on whether man was 'an ape or an angel . . . My Lord, I am on the side of the angels'.[101]

The novel that Disraeli published six years later in 1870, *Lothair*, expressed this very partiality. When situated within Disraeli's wider political and religious rhetoric in the 1860s, *Lothair* illustrates Disraeli's anxiety about the impinging threats to religious faith from

[97] *BDL* viii, p. 147.
[98] *BDL* viii, p. 147.
[99] *M&B*, iv, p. 361.
[100] 'Mr. Disraeli on the Present Position of the Church', *The Times* 15 Nov. 1861, p. 7.
[101] *BDL* viii, p. 381. See also Ibid., p. xiv, where the editors of *BDL* claim that Disraeli's 'Apes and Angels' speech represented a nuanced position.

schools of scientific materialism and broad theology. The hero Lothair spends the story searching for truth within various experiences of religious reverie and amid a plurality of ideological narratives. At the beginning of the novel, he becomes the pawn of the Roman Catholic clergy of England. He then grows enchanted with the humanist doctrines of Italian, anti-Papal nationalists before he becomes the object of a Vatican conspiracy. He finally lands on a transcendent doctrine of Judeo-Christian wisdom – recognizable to readers of Disraeli's novels as the form of religious truth that each hero eventually achieves – which is imparted to him in Jerusalem by an enigmatic spiritual adviser called Paraclete. The novel ends with his marriage to an Anglican aristocrat, Lady Corisande, in which it is implied that he can live out his broadly conceived, Israel-enriched Anglicanism.

Scholars such as Robert O'Kell and Daniel Schwarz have claimed that '*Lothair*'s popularity can be attributed not only to Disraeli's status as the former Prime Minister, but to its anti-Catholicism', or have regarded it as another strategic manifesto in Disraeli's 'Church in Danger' rhetoric.[102] But rather than constructing his hero as a triumphant Protestant in order to quell Roman Catholic anxieties, Disraeli put Lothair through a labyrinth of different confessional positions, each of which holds allure and promise, even after he rejects them in favour of Anglicanism at the end of the story. This entanglement in different doctrines allowed Disraeli to interrogate the veracity and functionality of various beliefs, in order to combat the most salient threat the novel imagines: unbelief. Lothair's conclusive conviction – 'there must be design' – becomes the untainted principle he holds throughout the novel as he dodges the corruption of the ecclesiastical and ideological institutions that threaten to ensnare him. The novel speaks to the necessity of faith – rather than atheism – in a context in which scientific accounts of creation had shaken the foundational assumptions of theism. In keeping with the religious inquiries in Disraeli's novels from the 1830s, *Lothair* illustrated Disraeli penetrating the limits and rewards of religious belief in an age of seeming doubt.

[102] Daniel Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction* (London, 1979), p. 127. Cf. O'Kell, *Disraeli*, pp. 392-4.

It was in the spirit of this church unity, and in pursuit of this unified front against the threat of unbelief, that Disraeli passed the Public Worship Regulation Bill of 1874, on the insistence of Queen Victoria. Archbishop Tait's controversial bill ecclesiastically outlawed a number of ritualist practices thought to swerve the Church too near to Roman Catholic liturgy.[103] Given Disraeli's persistent reverence for Roman Catholicism throughout his fiction, and given his involvement in the high-church ethos of Young England, his parliamentary quelling of ritualism could, and has, been seen as inconsistent, and as evidence of his detachment from religious or ecclesiastical sentiments. Charles Wood (later Lord Halifax) wrote to H.P. Liddon after the passage of the Act to say,

> I hear on *very good authority* that Lord Beaconsfield says – 'He was always against the P.W.R.A, but that it was forced upon him by the Queen and the Archbishop.' This is not improbable, for it was not a matter he would naturally have cared about. It is significant however his saying so.[104]

Disraeli biographer and friend T.E. Kebbel (1826-1917) expressed it differently in his *Life of Lord Beaconsfield* (1888). Kebbel cited a speech from 1873 to illustrate 'the degree in which, at the age of sixty-eight, he still clung to his original convictions, and the form which they had taken in his mind, after thirty years experience of progress'.[105] Disraeli's speech spoke to the same religio-political questions that occupied his thought in the 1830s and 1840s.

> I believe that the Tory Party at present time occupies the most satisfactory position which it has held since the days of its greatest statesmen, Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville. . . But there are other questions not less important, and of deeper and higher reach and range, which must soon engage the attention of the country: the attributes of a constitutional monarchy – whether the aristocratic principle should be recognised in our Constitution, and if so, in what form? . . . Whether a National Church shall be maintained; and if so, what shall be its rights and duties? The functions of corporations, the sacredness of endowments, the tenure of landed property, the free disposal, and even existence of any kind of property, all those institutions, and all those principles which have made this country free and famous, and conspicuous for its union of

[103] See James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford, 1978). See Garby W. Graber, *Ritual Legislation in the Victorian Church of England: Antecedents and Passage of the Public Worship Regulation Act, 1874* (San Francisco, 1993).
[104] Halifax Papers (Borthwick Institute, York), General Correspondence, 125-7: Charles Wood to H.T. Liddon, Undated. My thanks to Barry Orford for generously sharing this reference with me from his own research.
[105] Thomas Edward Kebbel, *Life of Lord Beaconsfield* (London, 1888), p. 57.

> order with liberty, are now impugned, and in due time will become great and burning questions.[106]

Kebbel argued that Disraeli's political and religious thought remained consistent through his life. Indeed, when reinterpreted through the lens of the religious controversies and moral questions that dominated Victorian public discourse, Disraeli's fiction and political rhetoric – and crucially, the close dialogue between the two – produces the image not of an isolated eccentric, but of a complicated, ambitious thinker who sought to sought to guide the nation on an epic and existential path. In his biography of Disraeli, Kebbel claimed that 'the natural bent of his mind was to see in the Catholic Church only a continuation of the Jewish, and to recognise in her rites and ceremonies the legitimate fulfilment of those which God had ordained in the Old Testament'.[107] It is significant that Kebbel, Disraeli's contemporary, perceived Disraeli thinking within this biblical framework, viewing churches and nations as the extensions and culminations of ancient religious history. This chapter now turns to the sensitivity of contemporary biographers in grasping Disraeli's religious thought, and in placing him within the religious complexity of nineteenth-century Britain.

[106] Ibid. For Disraeli's relationship with Kebbel, see Jonathan Parry, 'Kebbel, Thomas Edward (1826–1917)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/93362].
[107] Kebbel, *Lord Beaconsfield*, pp. 173-4.

II.

Nineteenth-century perspectives

The portrait of Disraeli outlined above – as biblically literate and religiously invested – squares uneasily with the construction of Disraeli that dominates twentieth-century biographies: the shrewd, unprincipled political pragmatist and individualist Romantic genius. But Disraeli's contemporaneous biographers grasped his joint commitment to the principles of Judaism and Christianity, and remained, compared to later biographers, unfazed by his seemingly unformulated theological assertions. These early biographies advance an overriding message about Disraeli's religious line throughout his career: they focus less on any doctrinal inadequacy within his Jewish and Christian religious claims, and much more on his fervent opposition to what J.A. Froude called 'the mushroom philosophies of the present age'.[108] Disraeli joined other nineteenth-century commentators such as Thomas Carlyle and even J.H. Newman in his fear of unreligious, untraditional, doctrines of progress. Tancred represented Disraeli when he claimed that, '"enlightened Europe is not happy. Its existence is a fever, which it calls progress. Progress to what?"'[109] Early biographers, particularly Charles Alexander Ewald, James Anthony Froude, and T.E. Kebbel, heard Disraeli's philosophical traditionalism much more resoundingly than they did his 'muddled' theology. It is telling that these writers almost always began their discourses of Disraeli's ideas and opinions by outlining the intellectual climate to which Disraeli responded in his own ideological arguments. Perhaps this very practice rendered it conspicuous that Disraeli developed a substantial array of ideas about religion, almost all of which were in dialogue with other thinkers, and many of which responded to specific debates about the purchase of theology and Church in a changing society.

Alexander Charles Ewald (1842-91) came of age in a family of Jewish-Christian converts and evangelists. His father, Ferdinand Christian Ewald, was born to Jewish parents

[108] James Anthony Froude, *Life of Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1890), p. 84.
[109] Disraeli, *Tancred,* pp. 123, 224.

in 1802 and converted to Christianity in 1822. Ferdinand Ewald studied at the seminary of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews before travelling to North Africa as a missionary in 1832. He was ordained by the bishop of London in 1836, and then moved to Jerusalem to serve as chaplain to Michael Solomon Alexander, the first Anglican bishop of Jerusalem.[110] Ferdinand Ewald also earned a doctorate for his publication of a German translation of the Talmudic treatise on idolatrous worship and was recognized by Archbishop Tait for his scholarship in Hebrew.[111] His son Alexander – Disraeli's biographer – was born in Jerusalem in 1842 during his father's tenure there as missionary and chaplain. After being educated abroad, Ewald became a clerk at the Public Record Office in 1860 and from his clerkship, branched out to write popular texts – histories, biographies, and handbooks – in the early 1870s, of which one was a life of Disraeli.[112]

Alexander Ewald's interpretation of Disraeli's religion suggests that in the context of changing Victorian faith, Disraeli's 'muddled' Judeo-Christian ideas were not only unsurprising to other religious thinkers, but understandably convoluted considering his dual religious heritage. Ewald's discussion of Disraeli began with Judaism. His biography opens with a section on 'Modern Judaism', in which he contextualizes Disraeli's religious ideas in light of the D'Israeli family's Judaism and in particular Isaac's relationship to the Bevis Marks synagogue in London. Ewald claimed that contemporary Judaism was 'fast losing its distinctive characteristics; it is gradually developing into a deism'.[113] Families like the D'Israelis who mingled and excelled in non-Jewish arenas, Ewald insisted, represented the modern British Jewish experience:

> The modern Jew, cultivated and unrestricted, chooses the profession he thinks most suited to his abilities, rises rapidly in it, and mixes freely, if it will permit him, with the society of the country of his adoption. The precepts of the Talmud and the lore of the rabbis sit lightly upon him . . . He lives very much as those who are of a different faith around him . . . Modern Judaism is now but a

[110] For details of Ewald's involvement in Society, see W.T. Gidney, *The History of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, From 1809-1908* (London, 1908), pp. 158-61.
[111]Alan Bell, 'Ewald, Ferdinand Christian (1802–1874)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/9009].
[112] Ewald would have been a part of the integration of the Public Records Office into historical writing. See Michael Bentley in *Companion to Historiography*, (London, 1997), p. 434.
[113] Alexander Charles Ewald, *The Right. Hon. Benjamin Disraeli and his Times* (London, 1881), i, p. 5.

> mechanical creed, and, since its animating spirit is extinct, it cannot be expected to possess much influence upon its followers.[114]

Ewald describes the Jews as a religious people in flux. They have departed from their orthodox theology and adopted an expansive theistic creed that resembles the Christian faith of England. In Ewald's narrative, Disraeli's family context and his upbringing within this trajectory of British Jewish assimilation positioned Disraeli to intellectually assent to Anglicanism in his maturity. Indeed, it was the ripe ground of his early Jewish theism, for Ewald, that allied Disraeli to Christians in opposing new atheistic and scientific philosophies. He cited Disraeli's 'Apes and Angels' speech from 1864 – in which Disraeli decried the evils of Darwin, the writers of *Essays and Reviews* and German biblical criticism at large[115] – to demonstrate the manner in which Disraeli's early Judaism contributed to his later religious ideology:

> At no time had the various forms of unbelief, now so fashionable in intellectual quarters, any attractions for him: he was always, as he frankly admitted, "on the side of the angels." He never doubted the reality of the Jewish theocracy; he was a firm believer in the divinity of the dispensation which succeeded it.[116]

Disraeli's Jewish contexts formed the theological soil out of which grew his Christianity, and his intellectual grounds for rejecting unbelief. Jewish theocracy, Ewald explained, provided the backbone of Disraeli's religious thought.

It followed that his Jewish intellectual framework gave Disraeli his sense of political destiny: 'Like the prophets of old [Disraeli] believed he was under the especial protection of the Most High, and that it was his mission to regenerate the condition of his country'.[117] Disraeli's deeply-running paradigmatic religious assumptions – in this case, the narrative of Jewish exceptionalism – created his subsequent conception of himself as a genius, chosen to govern a nation. In Ewald's words,

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[114] *Ibid.,* pp. 5-6. See Endelman, *The Jews of Britain* (2002), p. 95. Endelman's discussion of middle class Jewish assimilation in nineteenth-century London suggests that there is some historical truth in Ewald's interpretation of Judaism: Jews were self-consciously assimilating to, as Endelman puts it 'middle-class standards of decorum and piety'.
[115] See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of Disraeli's response to Darwin and the Broad Church.
[116] Ewald, *Disraeli and his Times*, i, p. 8.
[117] *Ibid*. See Clyde J. Lewis, 'Disraeli's Conception of Divine Order', *Jewish Social Studies*, 24 (1962), pp. 144-61 for a rare example of how this idea has been carried into twentieth-century studies.

> It was his belief in his race that made him believe in himself; it was because he could lay claims to a descent which made the pedigree of the proudest Norman baron but a creation of yesterday . . . A man who was of the same family to which it had pleased the Son of God, in His infinite condescension, to attach Himself, had no reason to be ashamed of his birth, or to yield precedence to the haughtiest English peer.[118]

This reading reflects an important quality about nineteenth-century understandings of social and political character. While twentieth-century historians invariably isolate Disraeli's views on 'the Son of God' from his sense of self or his political vocation, Ewald viewed Disraeli's theological assumptions as existential, foundational ones, inextricable from his political ideology. He described Disraeli's Jewish descent as comprising an interconnected racial and religious connection to the Jews. Ewald's statement that 'It was his belief in his race' indicates the relatedness of belief and racial inheritance in this period.[119] In the nineteenth-century mind, Disraeli's public enthusiasm about his Jewish origins – what Hannah Arendt called his 'Jewish chauvinism'[120] – was rooted in a theological understanding of the Jews as the people who produced Jesus Christ.

James Anthony Froude (1818-94) similarly viewed Disraeli's theological opinions as arising out of a fundamentally Jewish childhood. Froude's oscillation between faith and doubt, experience of conflicted churchmanship throughout life, and entrenchment in nineteenth-century religious debates, make him a significant witness to Disraeli's religious ideas. His commentary needs re-emphasis after the last century of biographical assumptions about Disraeli, especially because of the ease with which he copes with the question of Disraeli's sincerity (a point on which subsequent historians continue to stumble). Froude took seriously Disraeli's ideological arguments because he considered at length the intellectual contexts which contributed to Disraeli's texts. He held that Disraeli's typically ostentatious and satirical prose style, and his reputation as a 'man of the world' in no way precluded the

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[118] Ewald, *Disraeli and his Times*, i, p. 8.
[119] See Chapter 4 of this thesis for full discussion of race and religion in nineteenth-century Britain and Disraeli's use of race in his texts.
[120] For use of the term 'Jewish chauvinism', see Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* Part I: Antisemitism (New York, 1968), p. 74. Cf. Todd M. Endelman, 'Disraeli's Jewishness Reconsidered', *Modern Judaism* 5, No. 2 (1985), pp. 117-21.

solemnity of his concern for the moral state of England, which Disraeli shared with other thinkers, namely Carlyle and Froude himself.

The wider intellectual tides in which Disraeli wrote was a priority for Froude, given the genre of his biography. When the journalist Stuart Reid asked him to write a life of Disraeli in 1890 as part of *The Prime Ministers of Queen Victoria* (9 vols., 1890-5), Froude aimed to produce a critical and intellectual biography of Disraeli, rather than a laudatory hagiography.[121] He introduced *The Life of the Earl of Beaconsfield* with a discussion of Carlyle's hatred of Disraeli, the irony of which became apparent, Froude argued, when one realised similarity between the two thinkers. This opening discussion set the tone for the biography, and illustrated the common arena of ideological and religious debate in which Froude saw himself, Carlyle, and Disraeli, as active participants. The editor Ernest Rhys, writing the 'Introduction' to Froude's biography for the Everyman's Library edition in 1914, claimed that 'A contemporary biography that opens with a Carlylean judgment on its subject, looks at politics across the screen of history, and ends on a proverbial note [. . .] is a book that sets out to be critical and alive to the larger issues'.[122]

Principal among those larger issues came Disraeli's religious ideas. Like Ewald, Froude positioned Disraeli comfortably within the plethora of religious expression in nineteenth-century Britain: a religious atmosphere in which the shared common denominators of a theistic understanding of the origins of the universe, and a biblical construction of the nature of divine truth, were the basis for increasingly multifarious religious practices. He recognized Disraeli's expressions of both Jewish and Christian attitudes as nebulous – somewhere between full conviction and acceptance of certain truths as more probable than others. For Froude, this represented a certain characteristic of the age.

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[121] For a discussion of Froude's historical method, see Michael Bentley, 'Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography Since the Enlightenment' in Bentley (ed.), *Companion to Historiography*, pp. 426-7.

[122] James Anthony Froude, *Life of Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1890), p. vii. See also Ciaran Brady, *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet* (Oxford, 2013), p. 2. See also Alec Waugh, 'Rhys, Ernest Percival (1859–1946)', rev. Katharine Chubbuck, *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/35733].

He came of age in a family, and thereafter, in an intellectual climate in Oxford, in which religious nuances abounded. His brother Richard Hurrell Froude acted as an instrumental member of the early Tractarian movement, responsible for initiating the friendship of John Keble and J.H. Newman.[123] Froude shared with his brother the experience of a 'series of psychological and intellectual crises' while at Oriel College, Oxford, but they disagreed on most aspects of religious practice.[124] In the aftermath of Richard Hurrell Froude's death it was hoped that J.A. Froude would carry on the Tractarian zeal. But his religious position emphatically diverged from his late brother's. While the Tractarians attempted to erase the effects of the Protestant Reformation and shunned new schools of German theology, Froude acclaimed the Reformation's Protestant influence on subsequent theology, and even viewed the schools of German criticism as a welcome shift in biblical exegesis.[125] His religious interests and beliefs developed into complicated, and at times seemingly contradictory positions, ranging from, as A.F. Pollard has stated, 'admirable latitudinarianism, his interest in Buddhism, his pleas for a free discussion of religious difference . . . [and] his repeated attacks on Romanism'.[126] Like many of his contemporaries, Froude's faith became a project of mitigating the incongruities of different religious ideas. [127] His controversial readings of ecclesiastical history took shape in his *Nemesis of Faith* (1849), a copy of which can still be found in Disraeli's library at Hughenden. In the novel, Froude described his introduction to reading Carlyle: 'for the first time now it was brought home to me that two men may be as sincere, as earnest, as faithful, as uncompromising, and yet hold opinions far asunder as the poles'.[128] These experiences in his early life transformed Froude's faith. He read Carlyle, he interrogated the faith of his youth, and he encountered this living, practically-applied

[123] Piers Brendon, 'Froude, (Richard) Hurrell (1803–1836)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/10203].
[124] See Brady, *Froude* (2013), p. 55. The Froude brothers had a deeply strained relationship.
[125] See A. F. Pollard, 'Froude, James Anthony (1818–1894)', rev. William Thomas, *ODNB* 2004; [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/10202].
[126] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[127] See Jane Garnett, 'Protestant Histories: James Anthony Froude, Partisanship and National Identity' in Lawrence Goldman & Peter Ghosh (eds.), *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew*, (Oxford, 2006), p. 174.
[128] J.A. Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith* (2nd edn. London, 1849), pp. 156-7.

evangelical faith of a family in Ireland, when he went to act as their tutor in 1840. The result, as Jane Garnett has argued, was that, as 'both Maurice and Charles Kingsley had, Froude came to feel the importance of considering religion less as a set of dogmas which one holds than as a reality which upholds one'. Froude was convinced of, in Garnett's words, 'the dynamic nature of faith'.[129] Froude saw religion as a deeply complicated and malleable set of ideas that necessarily interacted with changing political and ideological circumstances. He stated in his *Life* of Disraeli: 'Religion [. . .] is a thing which grows and cannot be made'.[130]

Froude's biography did not represent an abstract scholarly reflection; on the contrary, his direct dealings with Disraeli during his lifetime ranged from direct criticism to close political involvement. In the 1860s Froude edited *Fraser's Magazine of Town and Country,* which criticized what it perceived as Disraeli's ineptitude in recognizing the need for the extension of the franchise. But by 1874, Froude found himself involved in Disraeli's second ministry, when Carnarvon, as Colonial Secretary, sent him to South Africa on an ambassadorial mission to ascertain the likelihood of white settlers in various parts of the two Boer republics, Cape Colony, and Natal coming together to form a colonial confederation. Disraeli was disappointed in the outcome of the undertaking, which was pronounced a disaster. Further, in the Eastern crisis of 1876-8 Froude was publicly opposed to Disraeli's pro-Ottoman policy.

This context to Froude's religious ideas and contact with Disraeli needs emphasis when we consider his handling of Disraeli's religion.[131] Because Froude understood religion as dynamic and growing, and because he moved in similar political and intellectual spheres, he considered and contextualised the socio-political environment in which Disraeli thought and wrote before he attempted to explain his religious attitudes. This remains among the most noteworthy characteristics of Froude's biography because it distinguishes it most from the methodologies of twentieth-century histories. Froude's contextualisation can even be seen

[129] Garnett, 'Protestant Histories', pp. 175, 173, 176, 181.
[130] Froude, *Beaconsfield* (1890), p. 171.
[131] See Brady, *Froude*, pp. 243, 310.

from the summaries of each chapter on the title page. In Chapter VII, for example, 'Disraeli's personal views' come after a discussion of 'The enthusiasm of progress', the 'High Church movement at Oxford', the 'Church as a Conservative power' and the 'Effect of the Reform Bill'. Chapter XI dealt particularly with Disraeli and religion. The entry on the title page shows Froude negotiating Disraeli's religious thought within a wider literary and political culture.

> Chapter XI
> 'Tancred; or, the New Crusade' – Modern philosophy – The 'Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation' – 'Life of Lord George Bentinck – Disraeli's religious views – Revelation as opposed to Science – Dislike and dread of Rationalism – Religion and statesmanship – The national creed – the supplement of the national law – Speech in the theatre at Oxford – Disraeli on the side of the angels.[132]

In the chapter itself, Froude interpreted Disraeli as a contributor to a wide, Tractarian-inspired anxiety regarding the empty morality of the age, and specifically, the intellectual threat of scientific materialism. Disraeli blamed the ascent of a scientific mentality in public culture, and specifically 'political economy', for the agitation that resulted in Chartism. Further, he rejected scientific empiricism and its consequent schools of thought because he believed in the specific religious revelation received by the Jews. In Froude's words,

> Science was the knowledge of facts; the facts most important to be known were the facts of human nature and human responsibilities; and the interpretation of those facts which had been revealed to his own race, Disraeli actually believed to be deeper and truer than any modern speculations.[133]

Disraeli 'was a Hebrew to the heart of him' and he 'accepted the Hebrew tradition as the true account of the world, and of man's place in it'.[134] Froude viewed Disraeli's belief in the claims of Judaism as a relatively simple fact: one which not only made sense in this Victorian religious space, but also one which explained Disraeli's religious position in the broader debate on faith versus materialism. A welded Judaism and Christianity provided the basis for Disraeli's religious conviction, '[Disraeli] regarded Christianity as only Judaism developed,

[132] James Anthony Froude, *Life of Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1890), p. xii.
[133] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[134] *Ibid.*, p. 108.

and, if not completely true, yet as immeasurably nearer to truth than the mushroom philosophies of the present age.'[135]

This same Jewish-Christian theology explained for Froude the main purchase of *Tancred*. Twentieth-century scholars overwhelmingly dismissed *Tancred*, in Blake's case, as a 'vehicle for Disraeli's own highly idiosyncratic views on race and religion', or in Smith's words, as 'no more than a vapid vehicle for his creator's ideological obsessions'.[136] By contrast, Froude viewed the novel as Disraeli's ambitious contribution to a wider debate about the value of religious belief, in which he asserted the need for spiritual regeneration and a restoration of religious authority as a necessary combatant against new scientific accounts of creation. The single passage of *Tancred* which Froude chose to discuss at length demonstrates that he interpreted the novel principally as a venue for Disraeli's ideological arguments about faith. He recalled the scene in *Tancred* in which Lady Constance, a satirically rendered woman of leisure who has taken up scientific study, enthusiastically promotes a new scientific publication called *Revelations of Chaos*. The fictional volume acted as a thinly disguised copy of Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, published just three years before *Tancred* in 1844 (and a copy of which Disraeli had in his library at Hughenden).[137] In the scene, Lady Constance excitedly informs Tancred that in *Revelations*, '"Everything is explained by geology and astronomy, and in that way it shows you exactly how a star is formed. Nothing can be so pretty, a cluster of vapour, the cream of the Milky Way, a sort of celestial cheese churned into light. You must read it. 'Tis charming."' She enlightens Tancred on the book's account of the evolutionary progress of humankind: '"I think there were shells, then fishes. Then came – let me see – did we come next? . . . Ah, that is it! we were fishes!"' Tancred sternly replies, '"I do not believe I ever was a fish"'.[138]

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[135] *Ibid*., p. 84.
[136] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 194; Smith, *Disraeli*, pp. 85-90.
[137] For Chambers as a precursor to Darwin, see Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 157-8.
[138] Disraeli, *Tancred*, pp. 112-3. See Robert Chambers, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844; 12th edn., Edinburgh, 1884), pp. 55-89. For a response to Chambers, see Thomas Monck Mason, *Creation by the Immediate Agency of God as opposed to Creation by Natural Law: being a refutation of the work entitled Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (London, 1845).

For Froude, Tancred's dissatisfying conversation with Lady Constance acted as the intellectual catalyst for Tancred's subsequent quest to the Holy Land to seek spiritual affirmation. That scene was the crux of the novel, and the novel acted as Disraeli's commentary on 'the theory thus airily sketched [which] has been established since, in a more completed argument, by Darwin'.[139] Like Carlyle, Disraeli feared the reductive tendencies of scientific theories, which damaged morality and poisoned the *bodypolitick*. Froude summarised the intellectual posit of *Tancred* accordingly, claiming that the novel was Disraeli's contribution to the religious urgencies of the 1840s, which would come to a head in the controversies of *On the Origins of Species* and *Essays and Reviews*. He drew a direct connection between these broader anxieties and Disraeli's statements in *Tancred*:

> But between criticism and science and materialism, and the enervating influence of modern habits, the belief which lingered in form had lost its commanding power. Before the diseases of society could be cured the creed must be restored to its authority. The Tractarians were saying the same thing in tones of serious conviction. Disraeli, the politician and the man of the world, was repeating it in a tone which wavered between mockery and earnestness, the mockery perhaps, being used as a veil to cover feelings more real than they seemed. [140]

The tone which wavered between mockery and earnestness was simply Disraeli's *modus operandi*; Froude never saw it as mutually exclusive to Disraeli's participation in the moral and intellectual issues of his country. This is especially apparent in Froude's explanation of the difference between Disraeli's and Carlyle's reactions to the Oxford Movement, which he described as the Church of England 'awaking out of its sleep, and claiming to speak again as the Divinely-appointed rule of English souls'.[141] While Carlyle's philosophical, 'keen, clear eyes refused to be deceived', Disraeli came to the same conclusion through the means of his own political, moral, and religious interests:

> A politician like Disraeli looking out into the phenomena in which he was to play his part, and thinking more of what was going on among the people than of the immediate condition of Parliamentary parties, conceived that he saw in the new movement, not only an effort of Conservative energy, *but an indication of a genuine recoil*

[139] Froude, *Beaconsfield* (1890), p. 167.
[140] *Ibid.*, p. 166.
[141] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

> *from moral and spiritual anarchy towards the Hebrew principle in which he really believed*.[142]

Disraeli's Jewish paradigm extended to, and indeed, logically enabled his political and moral aversion to the anarchy that seemed to result from the rise of science.

The same paradigm explained Disraeli's motivation in writing Chapter 24 in *Lord George Bentinck* (1852). Froude's analysis of the chapter began: 'The most important fact to every man is his religion. If we would know what a man is we ask what notions he has formed about his duty to man and God'.[143] In Chapter 24 Disraeli asked the question of himself, and answered it unabashedly: 'Disraeli … in his book invites attention to his own views . . . An insincere profession on such a subject [religion] forfeits the respect of everyone, and we are entitled to examine what he says and to enquire how far he means it'.[144] As he had done in *Alroy* and in his 1847 speech in favour of Jewish Relief, Disraeli framed his arguments as theological ones, and cited the Bible extensively. The accusation that the Jews were to blame for the killing of Christ was historically inaccurate, he explained, because before Christ, the Jews had already dispersed from Jerusalem and 'there were many more Jews living', for example, 'at Alexandria than at Jerusalem'.[145] As proof, he cited the Pentecostal account in the book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus' disciples after his Ascension. On the day of the Pentecost, the Scripture specifies that 'there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven'.[146] Disraeli used this to show that the Jews had already dispersed to 'every nation under heaven' before the crucifixion, and therefore they were 'guiltless of that subsequent conduct which has been imputed to them as a crime'.[147]

Froude's examination of this text became one of discerning whether Disraeli believed in 'what we generally call the "creed of science". . . that the world has been generated by the impersonal forces of nature' or whether he believed 'that God created the world and created

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[142] *Ibid*.
[143] *Ibid*., p. 168.
[144] *Ibid*., pp. 168-9.
[145] Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck*, p. 315.
[146] See Acts 2:5.
[147] *Ibid*., p. 316.

man to serve Him, that He gave a man a revelation of His law and holds him answerable for disobedience to it'.[148] Froude expressed the outcome of the examination unambiguously: Disraeli believed in the divine revelation made to his ancestors; and further, he defended the Jews not on his party's grounds of religious toleration, but on the explicit basis of their religious and moral exceptionality:

> Disraeli, with a confessed pride in belonging himself to the favoured race, desires us to understand that he receives with full and entire conviction the fact that a revelation was really made to his forefathers, and rejects the opposite speculation as unsupported by evidence and degrading to human nature. The subject is introduced in an argument for the admission of the Jews to Parliament. He does not plead for their admission on the principle of 'toleration,' which he rejects as indifferentism, but on the special merits of the Jews themselves, and on their services to mankind.[149]

Lord John Manners, whose singular religious vision for the country was best expressed by his statement that 'nothing but monastic institutions can Christianise Manchester', came to a different conclusion regarding Disraeli's chapter of Jewish apologetic.[150] He wrote to Disraeli regarding *Bentinck* on 13 January 1852:

> With the general tone, and the writing of your book I am greatly delighted. The character of Peel is a masterpiece & may rank with Clarendon's pictures: but I regret that more of G.B's letters were not given, and cannot think the insertion of that most remarkable 24th. chapter justifiable. There-after this you will not accuse me of not speaking my mind frankly.[151]

Both Manners' scepticism and Froude's conclusion about Disraeli's beliefs suggest that in his contemporary religious environment, Disraeli's statements were taken seriously. Froude's closing remarks on Disraeli's 'Chapter 24' suggest the fluidity of nineteenth-century religious expression, and why Disraeli's religious ideas fit into such a setting,

> It is to be remembered also that in his real nature he remained a Jew, and his thoughts on these great subjects ran on Asiatic rather than on European lines. We imagine that the Scriptures must be read everywhere into the same meaning; we forget how much European thought has passed into them through the traditions of the Church and through the various translations. In the English

[148] Froude, *Beaconsfield*, p. 169.
[149] *Ibid*.
[150] Qtd. in Jonathan Parry, 'Manners, John James Robert, seventh duke of Rutland (1818–1906)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/34855].
[151] *BDL*, vi, p. 10, John Manners to Disraeli, Jan 1852.

> version St. Paul reasons like an Englishman. A Jew reads in St. Paul's language allusions to oriental customs and beliefs of which Europeans know nothing; we have therefore no reason to suspect Disraeli of insincerity because he did not express himself as we do.[152]

Disraeli professed his commitment to theological truths within an intellectual milieu in which scriptural interpretation varied broadly, and religious practice differed widely. Froude's emphasis on Disraeli's fervent opposition to new philosophies, and the manner in which he understood Disraeli's Judaism and Christianity working together, attest to this contemporaneous religious atmosphere.

T.E. Kebbel similarly suggested that Disraeli's opinions on church and theology found some sort of a home in the religious conditions of nineteenth-century high political circles. As Jonathan Parry has shown, Kebbel was no impartial observer of Disraeli. In 1855 Kebbel was hired by D.T. Coulton to write for *The Press*, a Conservative newspaper founded by Disraeli himself, and in 1858 the two met and discussed their likeminded politics. Both believed fervently in the 'territorial constitution', in which a landowning aristocracy comprised the main political representation. Kebbel and Disraeli each lamented the forces and speed of ideological and social 'progress' in their time, and lauded the same political heroes: Bolingbroke, Burke, Pitt, and Canning.[153] In his short biography of Disraeli for the *Statesmen Series*, published in 1888, Kebbel's political admiration of Disraeli came through. But he was not undiscriminating, particularly on the subject of Disraeli's aptitude in dealing with the church. 'It was on ecclesiastical subjects that Lord Beaconsfield was seen to least advantage', he wrote. Rather than seeing Disraeli's views as 'idiosyncratic', as did Robert Blake, Kebbel viewed Disraeli's religious opinions as derivative, almost to a fault:

> Of the recent history of the Church of England, and of the true nature of the questions which separate her from Rome and from Geneva, his knowledge was imperfect; and his ideas, in consequence, unlike those which he had formed on politics and society, were not original. He took them from those whom he believed to be well informed upon the subject . . . He tells us that the Romish Church possesses 'the old learning as well as the new'.

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[152] *Ibid*., p. 170.
[153] Jonathan Parry, 'Kebbel, Thomas Edward (1826–1917)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/93362].

> When he refers to the Papacy it is not to condemn the Church but to suggest that the visible head of the Church should have been seated, not at Rome, but at Jerusalem. Both on the Monarchy and the Church of England the sentiments which he puts into the mouths of Coningsby and Henry Sidney are those of Hurrell Froude.[154]

Kebbel perceived a tangible link between Disraeli's philosophy and the Oxford Movement. He argued that Newman's and Disraeli's thought 'originated in the same source, the political and religious latitudinarianism which followed the revolution consummated in 1832', and that each attempted to revive 'the essential principles of the Church of England in the seventeenth, and of the Tory party in the eighteenth, century'.[155] Kebbel went so far as to claim that 'the work in which Newman explains his own conception of the attempt in which he was engaged, might serve, *mutatis mutandis*, for an epitome of Mr. Disraeli's'.[156] He referred to Newman's introduction to *Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church* (1837), in which he called for a *via media* between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, asking, 'whether, what is called Anglo-Catholicism . . . is capable of being professed, acted on, and maintained on a large sphere of action; or whether it be a mere modification of a transition state of either Romanism or popular Protestantism'.[157] This sense of a *via media* represented Disraeli's same goal of a compromise between the monarchism evoked by the medievalism of Young England, and the popular principles that were changing the political landscape. In addition to this comparison with Newman, Kebbel also likened Disraeli to Carlyle: in his words, 'The "individual" of the one is only "the hero" of the other'.[158]

Ewald, Froude, and Kebbel each attest to the importance of context in interpreting Disraeli's religious texts. They wrote about Disraeli's religion aptly because they positioned him in the same world as Newman, Carlyle, Maurice, and even Colenso and Gorham. Contemporaneous reviewers and critics of Disraeli's works took issue with his theological

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[154] *Ibid.*, pp. 173-4.
[155] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-8.
[156] *Ibid.*, p. 58.
[157] John Henry Newman, *Lecture on the Prophetical Office of the Church: Viewed Relatively to Romanism and Popular Protestantism* (London, 1837), pp. 21-2. Qtd. in Kebbel, *Lord Beaconsfield*, p. 58.
[158] Kebbel, *Lord Beaconsfield*, p. 58.

expressions precisely because, like Froude and Kebbel, they took seriously Disraeli's contributions to the debate on religious truth. For example, in 1847, *The Voice of Jacob*, a key Jewish periodical which described itself as 'a publication established to promote the spiritual and general welfare of the Jews of Great Britain' objected to a review of *Tancred* in *The Times*. The *Times* review had remarked on the strangeness of Disraeli's suggestion in *Tancred* that Jews should return to Eastern principles while at the very same moment in history, 'the Jewish people are eagerly adapting themselves to Christian usages and manners'.[159] The *Times* critic mocked Disraeli's hypocrisy: that 'whilst Mr. Disraeli eloquently discourses on a speedy return to Jerusalem, Sidonia buys a noble estate in Bucks, and Sidonia's first-cousin is high-sheriff of the county'. *The Voice of Jacob* correspondent retorted in defense of Disraeli's portrayal of Sidonia. It was not ridiculous, they wrote, for Sidonia to have an estate in Bucks; in fact, Sidonia 'not only does not act against the precepts of Judaism, but he literally follows the counsel of the prophet, who thus advised Israel, saying, "This captivity is long: build ye houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them" (Jerem. xxix., 28)'.[160]

A critic in *The Examiner* also took issue with Disraeli's theological assumptions in *Tancred*. The novel was 'an attempt to show that, as the Creator had deigned to reveal himself to his creatures in only one land, that land must be superior to every other . . . and that, whoever hopes to revivify the world, must seek his inspiration and regeneration there'. The writer found Disraeli's interpretation of the locality of God problematic and unsubstantiated by Scripture, claiming that, 'it was ill reverence to the Divine to seek to localize its influence or power; and that when those angels appeared to Mary and her companions at the sepulchre, it was expressly to tell them *He was risen: He was not there*'.[161] A columnist for *The Evening Post* similarly criticized Disraeli's audacity in writing explicitly about the will of God: 'He venerates Moses and the sacred record. Let him remember "Moses hid his face, for he was

[159] 'Judaism and the Reviewer of "Tancred" in *The Times*', *Voice of Jacob*, [Bodl] Dep. Hughenden 227 E/IV/9a.
[160] *Ibid*.
[161] *The Examiner* 20 March 1847, Hughenden MSS 227 E/IV/9e.

afraid to look upon God." Mr. Disraeli should fear to make such allusions as he does to the human career of the God and of the Christians'.[162]

These accusations of scriptural misinterpretation or religious presumptuousness only make sense if these critics considered Disraeli's religious ideas as contributions to the wide-ranging and high-stakes theological debates in which they were enmeshed. Such contemporaneous understandings of Disraeli's Judaism disrupt the narrative that he somehow transcended his time in religious history by engaging in a modern, playful manipulation of his religious identity. To a much greater extent than historians have allowed, his contributions to religious questions were the result of religious study and conviction. His reading in his father's library, study of the Hebrew Bible, and interest in Jewish texts and lore positioned him to revere the idea of a 'Jewish theocracy'. For Disraeli, this idea manifested itself in Christian England through a strong confessional state, which he advocated in both his fiction and political activity from the 1840s until the 1870s. In an era in which knowing one's Bible was a prerequisite for oratory in the the House of Commons, it is unsurprising that Disraeli made arguments – for the admission of Jews to Parliament in 1847, for example – on the grounds of theological truth. But this remains an area of Disraeli's ideology that had been almost entirely overlooked by modern critics. Victorian thinkers, on the other hand, read this in Disraeli, and saw him playing out this narrative of religious thought throughout his career. In the context of variegated nineteenth-century religious belief, historians more readily recognized Disraeli's nuanced, but significant, religious investments.

[162] *Ibid*.

CHAPTER 2

SCRIPTURE

> Man brings to the study of the oracles more learning and more criticism than of yore: and it is well that it should be so. The documents will yet bear a greater amount both of erudition and examination than they have received; but the word of God is eternal, and will survive the spheres.[1]

This chapter begins by returning to January of 1833, when the young Disraeli wrote home to his sister, Sarah, asking, 'Send me also my bible'.[2] Two months later, he published a novel called *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy*. The story was Disraeli's reinterpretation of the legend of a twelfth-century Jewish Messiah figure who led a campaign to recapture the Holy Land from the reigning Turkish Caliphate. In crafting this novel he drew extensively on themes of kingship and chosenness in the Hebrew Bible. When W.F. Monypenny dealt with *Alroy* in the first volume of his biography in 1910, he reprinted the following anecdote:

> Before the novel was published Disraeli boasted to a lady of evangelical turn, who inquired after his spiritual welfare, that [*Alroy*] would show he read his Bible. He read his Bible, indeed, though less to edification as his pious friend would have interpreted the word than as a record of exclusive interest to the race in which he belonged.[3]

This episode is intriguing for the questions it raises about Disraeli's relationship with Scripture, and the Bible in nineteenth-century history in general. It is assumed that the 'lady of evangelical turn' read her Bible differently from the young aspiring socialite and political player, Disraeli. While Disraeli ostensibly found interest in the history of his own Jewish identity, his 'pious friend' must have had earnest spiritual claims to the Bible. It also sheds light on the historiographical priorities of Monypenny, whose presentation of the incident stood in keeping with his idea that Disraeli had little genuine religious feeling, and that it was race which 'lies at the root of all his conceptions of religion'.[4]

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[1] Disraeli, 'General Preface' in *Lothair* (London, 1881) p. xvi.
[2] *BDL*, i, p. 320, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 29 Jan. 1833.
[3] *M&B*, i, p. 196.
[4] *M&B*, iii, p. 55.

Three months after *Alroy*'s publication, in June, Disraeli sent a package to the publishing house of the 'Messrs Rivington' containing the manuscript of a Sunday school catechism, co-authored by him and his sister Sarah. In his accompanying letter, he described the importance of the catechism, which would give children a grounding in the Old Testament before they learned the Gospels, and which he hoped Rivington would publish:

> It is learnt by rote during the time the children are reading the N.T. and assists their comprehension by explain[in]g the history of the peculiar people of God, and the connection of the prophecies from the time of Abraham to their completion in the coming of our Saviour.[5]

In the first half of the year 1833, then, Disraeli was reading and thinking about the Bible with significant care and interest. He continued to attend to this interest throughout his work, as both a fiction writer and political actor. Yet the Bible has largely disappeared from historical constructions of Disraeli's thought, just as it has often been marginalized in nineteenth-century intellectual history.

This chapter illustrates the ideological, intellectual, and narrative manner in which Disraeli thought within a biblical paradigm. A significant aspect of Disraeli's religious thought can be illuminated by simply recognizing the pervasiveness of the Bible in nineteenth-century ideology – especially in the spheres in which Disraeli operated. The first section discusses the complex role of the Bible in nineteenth-century literary culture, with particular focus on the relationship between the Bible and the novel form. It argues that the narrative authority of the Bible loomed large over, and worked deeply within, many of the nineteenth-century fictional traditions in which Disraeli consciously participated. The Bible remained the prototypical book, the epitome of the written word. Disraeli exchanged in this biblical currency to a much greater extent than scholars have allowed. We have already seen the degree to which Disraeli conceptualized nineteenth-century Britain as locked in an ideological battle that went back to biblical and ancient times. In his fiction, he rewrote biblical tropes to apply to the questions that most challenged his contemporary Britain: the relief of the poor, the

[5] *BDL*, i, p. 365, Disraeli to Messrs. Rivington, 20 Jun. 1833.

agitation for democracy, the question of religious establishment, and the perceived decline in religious belief.

The second section turns to this use of the Bible in his novels, with special reference to *Alroy* as one of his earliest and most neglected works of fiction. In what little critical attention it has received, *Alroy* has been interpreted variously as evidence of Disraeli's Romanticism, psychosexual formation, or nationalism, but the novel's biblical themes and language remain an undervalued theme. Through exposing Disraeli's extensive biblical allusion, it becomes clear that he based the narrative of *Alroy* on Old Testament narratives of chosenness and kingship. He situated the novel's questions – the veracity and sustainability of Scripture, ritual, and national consciousness – within the thematic structure of the biblical canon. In many ways *Alroy* functioned as a foundational novel for Disraeli. His later fiction, especially *Sybil* and *Tancred*, emulated its themes and language, and continued to reimagine the same plot of a 'chosen' hero who is ordained to deliver the nation back to its righteous position in relation to God. The chapter as a whole argues that through this experimentation with biblical themes in his literature, Disraeli formulated many of his ideological conceptions of the individual, the society, and the nation.

I.

Bible and novel in nineteenth-century literary culture

On 21 March 1847, in a review of Disraeli's *Tancred*, a columnist in *The Observer* claimed that 'theology is not fitted for the pages of a novel, much less those of a newspaper'.[6] A review in *The Evening Post* two days later similarly maintained that 'it is not in the pages of a romance that we can bear to contemplate divine mysteries which are matters of faith'.[7] This rule extended, seemingly, to the form of biography. When Disraeli published a political biography of Lord George Bentinck in 1852, another reviewer claimed, 'this book is not the place to discuss matters involving ethnology and theology'.[8] Such reviews seem to suggest that the genre of the novel or the biography came to be seen as inherently unreligious or unbiblical in the nineteenth century. This certainly represents the views of Disraeli's historians who have often regarded Disraeli's fiction as the result of a purely secular literary interest, despite his extensive reference to biblical texts in crafting his novels, and the fact that many of his tales have explicitly religious plots. Philip Guedalla, for example, claimed that in *Alroy* Disraeli 'treated Talmudic learning with friendly contempt', despite the fact that the entire novel is based upon the Old Testament.[9]

In fact, the moral, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical unsettling that occurred throughout the nineteenth century found perhaps its deepest expression in literature, and specifically, in the novel form. In recovering Disraeli's religious thought, we must situate his fiction within a literary culture in which new idioms and forms challenged and transformed traditional modes of biblical engagement, but nevertheless remained deeply interested in, and in dialogue with, the Bible as a narrative and moral authority. When placed back into the literary culture in which he wrote, it comes as no surprise that Disraeli called so extensively upon biblical

[6] Hughenden MSS 227 E/IV/9m.
[7] *Ibid*. E/IV/9n.
[8] *Ibid*. E/IV/10a.
[9] Philip Guedalla (ed.), *Alroy: Bradenham edition of the novels and tales of Benjamin Disraeli* (5 vols., London, 1927), p. vii.

language and themes in his novels. It is far more surprising that Disraeli's historians have lost sight of the centrality of religious and biblical thought in the literature of the period. For example, Monypenny made almost no reference to the biblical themes in *Alroy*. He drew no parallel between Alroy's murder of the Caliph's brother at the beginning of the novel, and the biblical episode in which Moses slays an Egyptian. Nor did he note that Alroy's sister is named 'Miriam', after Moses' sister of the same name. He claimed, rather, that Disraeli's Miriam was 'a character modelled on Disraeli's own sister'.[10] Perhaps this should come as no surprise. Disraeli has been notably excluded from many major studies of religion and literature in nineteenth-century Britain; Mark Knight and Emma Mason's *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature* (2006) made no mention at all of Disraeli, nor did the entirety of *The Blackwell Companion to The Bible in English Literature* (2009), despite its attention to nearly every other major Victorian novelist.[11]

Monypenny's interpretation of *Alroy* anticipated the two dominant understandings of the novel in subsequent studies: the psychological interpretation, and the 'Romantic medievalist' interpretation. In his 'Mutilated Diary' of 1833, Disraeli famously described the meaning of his early novels, 'My works are the embodification of my feelings. In *Vivian Grey* I have portrayed my active and real ambition: in *Alroy* my ideal ambition'.[12] Robert Blake was one of many biographers who have interpreted Disraeli's comment as 'nonsense'.[13] The myth of Alroy appealed to Disraeli, and embodied his 'ideal ambition', argued Blake, because it was 'the story of an alien who could make his way upwards in a hostile world [. . . and] climb to the summit in spite of being an outsider and an adventurer'.[14] Endelman echoed Blake's claim in maintaining that *Alroy* reflected Disraeli's 'desire to be a powerful leader in an alien land

[10] *M&B*, i, p. 194.
[11] See Mark Knight and Emma Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2006) and Rebecca Lemon, Emma Mason, Jonathan Roberts, and Christopher Rowland (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature* (Chichester, 2009). Neither index contains reference to Disraeli.
[12] Daniel Schwarz, 'Jewish Perspectives in Disraeli's fiction' in Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London, 2002), p. 43.
[13] Robert Blake, *Disraeli's Grand Tour: Benjamin Disraeli and the Holy Land, 1830-1* (New York, 1982), p. 113.
[14] *Ibid*., pp. 3, 113.

and his urge to validate the primacy of imaginative experience'.[15]Alternatively, or often additionally, critics labelled Disraeli as an aspiring Romantic poet and genius. His veneration and emulation of Lord Byron is well-documented; a favourite vignette amongst scholars has been Disraeli's desire to be rowed around Lake Geneva by Byron's boatman in an effort to re-enact *Childe Harold*.[16] The interpretation of Disraeli as a hopeful contributor to the genre of epic romance nearly always precludes consideration of the blatantly religious and biblical material in his novels. Geoffrey Harvey, the most recent editor of *Alroy*, claimed that 'the quest pattern of the romance [. . . in which] the heroic quester has to be tested' drove the narrative arc of the novel; he made no mention of the trajectory of Hebrew kingship.[17]

To remedy this historiographical oversight, we must connect Disraeli's fiction with recent reappraisal of the role of the Bible and religion in nineteenth-century fiction and poetry. Timothy Larsen has shown the extent to which the Protestant notion of *sola Scriptura* ran deeply across the spectrum of Victorian belief and unbelief. The absolute centrality of the Bible in Anglo-Catholic, Roman Catholic, Liberal Anglican, Evangelical, and even atheist thought throughout the period attests to Larsen's argument that the Victorians were simply marinated in Scripture.[18] Further, Kirstie Blair has demonstrated the deep dialogues at work between Victorian poets and contemporary ecclesiastical, liturgical, architectural, and biblical debates

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[15] Todd Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 113-4. Cf. Michael Flavin, *Disraeli: Novel as Political Discourse* (Brighton, 2005), p. 33.
[16] See Blake, *Disraeli*, pp. 51-3.
[17] Geoffrey Harvey (ed.), *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (in *The early novels of Benjamin Disraeli*, 6 vols, London, 2004), iv, p. vii. Hereafter referred to as simply '*Alroy*'.
[18] See Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford, 2011). See also Sue Zemka, *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford, 1997). For the religious milieux in which Disraeli wrote, see Knight and Mason, *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature*, esp. pp. 87-106 and pp. 152-89. For the ways in which other authors engaged with Scripture in fiction, see Lemon, Mason, Roberts, and Rowland (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature*, esp. pp. 413-25 and pp. 463-587. For a more secular, 'Bible as Literature' approach, see Harold Bloom, *Shadow of a Great Rock: A Literary Appreciation of the King James Bible* (New Haven, 2011). For the Bible outside of Anglican circles, see both Larsen (above) and Scott Mandelbrote and Michael Ledger-Lomas (eds.), *Dissent and the Bible in Britain, c. 1650-1950* (Oxford, 2013). For the relationship between Enlightenment thought and biblical scholarship, see Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton, 2007).

that are often forgotten in evaluations of nineteenth-century verse.[19] Victorian poets wrote and debated their own forms, in Blair's words, 'with the full consciousness that there was a bitter debate over form within and without the Church of England, and they drew deeply on liturgical and biblical narratives in crafting their responses.[20] While poetics became an arena for expression and experimentation with religious and liturgical issues, Norman Vance has demonstrated that something similar happened to the novel form. During the period of growing distrust for scriptural authority, novelists gained new ground in their own narrative power to contribute to 'some form of post-biblical grand narrative, some version of "salvation history"'.[21] Vance's argument about the writers whom he considered could be equally applied to Disraeli: 'Despite differences and dissent from the orthodoxies of the day [Eliot, Hardy, Ward, and Haggard] had in common a moral and imaginative attachment to the Bible and the writers associated with it, particularly Dante, Milton, Bunyan, and Wordsworth'.[22]

Indeed, it is precisely through his Romantic aspirations and emulations, and his desire to locate him himself in the Romantic literary canon, that we can be sure that Disraeli's fiction prioritized religious themes and drew deeply on Scripture. He would have been amply aware that in the English literary tradition to which he aspired, as Cynthia Scheinberg has phrased it, 'deep engagement with religion and Biblical texts' acted as the 'central organizing principle' in the canon.[23] Isaac D'Israeli was a prolific and well-known literary critic who had made his own attempt at poetry as a young man with *A Defence of Poetry* (1790) and *Narrative Poems* (1803). The library that Disraeli inherited from Isaac contained the complete works of Milton, Dryden, Pope, Swift, and of course, Shakespeare; as well as Warburton's *The History of English Poetry* (1774-81). For Disraeli, as for Byron, Shelley, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Ruskin, Christina Rossetti, and Matthew Arnold, the Bible, to borrow Larsen's phrasing, 'provided an

[19] See Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford, 2012), especially pp. 2-20. For Tennyson in particular, see Cornelia Pearsall, *Tennyson's Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue* (Oxford, 2008).
[20] Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion*, p. 6.
[21] Norman Vance, *Bible and Novel: Narrative Authority and the Death of God* (Oxford, 2013), p. 6.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 191.
[23] Cynthia Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England: Jewish Identity and Christian Culture* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 2.

essential set of metaphors and symbols . . . Scriptural knowledge [was] a required pre-requisite for entering into a Victorian author's imaginative world'.[24]

In his early novels, Disraeli was extremely self-conscious about carving his place in this imaginative world. In his preface to *Alroy* he included his extended exegesis from *Contarini Fleming* (1832), in which he meditated on the switch from the 'spirit of ancient poetry', which he classified as 'rather material than metaphysical', to the 'revolution [that] took place in the mode of communicating Thought', which allowed the poet 'the new means that permitted him to revel in a universe of boundless invention'.[25] He identified the poetic prose style of *Alroy* as a decisive contribution to this larger literary transition away from verse: 'While I have endeavoured to effect my own emancipation from the trammels of the old style, I do not for a moment flatter myself that the new one, which I offer, combines those rare qualities which I anticipate may be the ultimate result of this revolution'.[26] Disraeli explicitly placed himself in the same debates about poetic form which took ecclesiastical, liturgical, and biblical conflicts as their premises. His close friendship and literary exchange with Edward Bulwer Lytton – whose novels, in Vance's words, attempted to speak to 'the religious or quasi-religious realm of romance and mystery at the heart of life' – also attest to his self-perception as a Romantic religious writer.[27] The extent of his identification with Romantic writers and themes reached its apex in 1875 when he became the president of the 'Byron Memorial Fund'.[28] He wrote the novel *Venetia* (1837) in Lady Blessington's literary salon in Kensington, a hub for Romantic and bohemian writers and artists with whom Disraeli was proud to associate. The novel featured two main characters written to represent the poets Byron and Shelley.

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[24] Larsen, *A People of One Book*, p. 3.
[25] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 7.
[26] *Ibid*.
[27] See Vance, *Bible and Novel*, pp. 173-6; Vance argues that Bulwer Lytton contributed to Rider Haggard's novels of 'reconfigured religion'.
[28] I am indebted to Sandra Mayer, whose paper 'A Romantic Legacy: Benjamin Disraeli and Early-Victorian Celebrity Culture' at the British Association for Victorian Studies Conference in Leeds on 29 August 2015, explored Disraeli's importation of Romantic themes, especially in the novel *Venetia* (1837).

In his particular association with Byron, Disraeli also aligned himself with Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* (1815-16), which, like *Alroy*, focused on issues of nation and homeland; the Diaspora Jews and their alienation from the biblical Israel acted as the prototypical example of the politics of 'people and nation'.[29] Disraeli's biblical themes in *Alroy* so closely aligned with Byron's *Hebrew Melodies*, in fact, that it would not be entirely speculative to claim that Byron's work directly influenced Disraeli's. *Alroy* and *Hebrew Melodies* each feature rewritings of the prophet Daniel's reading of the wall at Belshazzar Palace and both focus on biblical kingship with especial reference to military power; in Byron's case, to King Saul and in Disraeli's, to David and Samuel. And both texts investigated the pattern of exile and redemption as an epitomized Jewish experience.[30]

Indeed, Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* and Disraeli's *Alroy* are just two examples of a wider Romantic preoccupation with nationhood within literature, which included significant meditations on biblical Israel as the epitome of a chosen and sacred nation.[31] This was one of a number of factors that contributed to deep conflations between Christianity and Judaism within British Romanticism, a paradigm in which Disraeli explicitly wrote. The importation of Jewish history to express English national identity also took the form of a widespread Victorian fascination with the Holy Land. Disraeli manifested this particular phenomenon over and over again in his novels; from *Alroy* in 1833 until *Lothair* in 1870, he nearly always placed his English protagonists in Jerusalem. Eitan Bar-Yosef notes that scholarship before and after Said's *Orientalism* (1978) often downplayed 'the momentous role played by biblical culture in the construction of Englishness' in favour of a 'a secular, de-Christianized' explanation of Orientalism as a cultural phenomenon'. Disraeli joined other Victorian travel

[29] See Nathan Isaac and Lord Byron, in Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (eds.), *A Selection of Hebrew Melodies, Ancient and Modern* (Tuscaloosa, 1988). For Byron's use of Jewish biblical paradigms, see especially Toby R. Benis, 'Byron's *Hebrew Melodies* and the Musical Nation' in Sheila A. Spector (ed.), *Romanticism / Judaica: A Convergence of Cultures* (Farnham, 2011), pp. 31- See also Thomas Ashton, *Byron's Hebrew Melodies* (London, 1972). See also Sheila A. Spector, *Byron and the Jews* (Detroit, 2010).
[30] Benis, 'Byron's *Hebrew Melodies*', p. 35.
[31] For Jewish chosenness as a language for articulating English nationalism, see Heidi Kaufman, *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel: Reflections on a Nested Nation* (Pennsylvania, 2009), pp. 1-27; for Jewish discourse in *Tancred* in particular, see pp. 59-93.

writers to Jerusalem in writing texts, as Bar-Yosef puts it, 'in which the metaphorical appropriation of the "Holy Land" overshadows the literal locus itself'.[32] In *Alroy* Disraeli makes little of the political machinery of the twelfth-century Middle East. Rather, true to his Romantic and Jewish frameworks, he was interested in the symbolic and religious purchase of Israel, and in reimagining a sacred covenant between God and nation, and between God and man.

The evangelical emphasis on the conversion of the Jews as a precursor to millennial expectations created a new attention on the content of the Old Testament.[33] Sheila Spector has shown the manner in which this renewed Christian interest in Hebrew Scriptures coincided with the mass publication of Hebrew texts that resulted from the Jewish Enlightenment.[34] These joint forces contributed to an interconnection between Jewishness, Judaic texts, and literary and intellectual Romanticism. Isaac D'Israeli's interest in Moses Mendelssohn ensured that Disraeli would read this literature, both in his father's own writing and in his father's library. He had Marcus Mortiz Kalisch's *Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament* (1855), Alfred Edersheim's *History of the Jewish Nation from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Reign of Constantine the Great* (1856), Samuel Sharpe's *History of the Hebrew Nation and its Literature* (1869), Ignac Goldziher's *Mythology among the Hebrews and its Historical Development* (1877), and Edmund Chilmead's English translation of Leon of Modena's *The History of Rites, Customs, and Manner of Life, of the Present Jews* (1650).[35] It has also been suggested that Disraeli knew David Levi's seminal handbook of Jewish thought and practices in the period, *A Succinct Account, of the Rites, and*

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[32] Eitan Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture 1799-1917* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 9-10.
[33] See Michael Ledger-Lomas, 'Evangelical Protestants, Jews and the Epistle to the Hebrews in mid-nineteenth century Britain', *Jewish Historical Studies* 47 (2016), pp. 70-90.
[34] See Sheila A. Spector (ed.), *British Romanticism and the Jews: History, Culture, Literature* (New York, 2002) and Spector (ed.), *The Jews and British Romanticism: Politics, Religion, Culture* (New York, 2005), as well as Spector's other texts listed in above footnotes. See also David B. Ruderman, *Jewish Enlightenment in an English Key: Anglo-Jewry's Construction of Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton, 2000), especially pp. 132-4 for D'Israeli's relationship to David Levi.
[35] These works can still be found in the library at Hughenden Manor. Disraeli often supplanted Isaac's bookplate with his own, signifying his ownership of the books after Isaac's death. This was the case in nearly all of Benjamin's books on theology and biblical criticism. See Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end"' in *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli* (1998) for a list of Jewish volumes in Isaac D'Israeli's library, including the translation of Leon of Modena.

Ceremonies, of the Jews (1782).[36] D'Israeli exposed his son to the Anglo-Jewish literary culture in which he operated, and Disraeli became, in Spector's words, 'the living embodiment of the combined Judeo-Christian tradition as it consolidated in the British Romantic reformation'.[37] Disraeli's thought and work on the subject of the Jews interacted intimately with his father's within this same Romantic paradigm, with D'Israeli publishing *The Genius of Judaism* in the same year that Disraeli published *Alroy* in 1833. As Stuart Peterfreund has demonstrated, despite his seeming rejection of Talmudic Judaism in his breakaway from the Bevis Marks Synagogue, in D'Israeli's work – specifically *Vaurien; or, Sketches of the Times* (1797) and *Flim-Flams!* (1805) – he launched a vigorous attack on the emptiness of Kantian and other Enlightenment philosophy, instead lauding a reformed version of Talmudic philosophy.[38] In *Genius of Judaism* D'Israeli extolled the purity of the divine knowledge handed down to Moses, 'the Deity designed his Hebrews as a human instrument to recover knowledge of the Creator; a knowledge which had been lost by worshippers of the heavenly bodies or statues, the rude symbols of the divinity'.[39] Much of D'Israeli's literary project became negotiating this essential Jewish inheritance, in which he clearly remained invested, with his ideological refutation of orthodox Judaism.

Other writers saw D'Israeli, and after him, Disraeli, engaged within this explicitly Anglo-Jewish literary discourse. In 1840 a young Grace Aguilar (1816-47) wrote to D'Israeli seeking literary patronage. Aguilar, who would go on to become among the most important nineteenth-century Jewish writers, confessed to D'Israeli that she lacked connection with the literary world and invoked her God-given writing talents in her plea for him to contact an editor on her behalf.

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[36] See Judith W. Page, 'Anglo-Identity and the Politics of Cultivation in Hazlitt, Aguilar, and Disraeli' in Spector (ed.), *The Jews and British Romanticism*, pp. 149-64, 160. Weintraub also suggests that the D'Israeli family would have been familiar with *The Jewish Ritual; Or, The Religious Customs and Ceremonies of the Jews Used in their Publick Worship and Private Devotions* (London, 1753).
[37] Spector (ed.), *British Romanticism and the Jews*, p. 8.
[38] Stuart Peterfreund, 'Not for "Antiquaries", but for "Philosophers": Isaac D'Israeli's Talmudic Critique and his Talmudical Way with Literature' in Spector (ed.), *British Romanticism and the Jews*, pp. 179-93. See also Peterfreund, 'Identity, Diaspora, and the Secular Voice in the Works of Isaac D'Israeli' in Spector (ed.), *The Jews and British Romanticism*, pp. 127-48.
[39] D'Israeli, *The Genius of Judaism*, pp. 33-4.

> Without a name to attract and completely obscured from Literary Society, or even from the acquaintance of any that could assist my own endeavours, by advising me in what manner to move forward, or to procure me an introduction through the magazines, every effort I have made has ended in disappointment . . . Yet I feel as if there were heavy walls around me, which I myself cannot pass. I am not visionary enough to look to fame as bringing happiness, or to believe that I could ever realize, by my writings, sufficient [income] for maintenance . . . I know well that neither of these could be, but the labour of teaching, peculiarly arduous by continually failing health, would be inexpressibly sweetened, by the thought, the talents my God has lent me not but entirely wasted by writing. . .[40]

D'Israeli would later compliment Aguilar on her recent publication, *The Spirit of Judaism* (1842) which comprised an exegesis of the central Hebrew prayer of *Shema Yisrael* – 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One' – from Deuteronomy 6:4. Aguilar went on to publish dozens of theological works, historical novels, domestic essays, and poetry.[41] In 1846 she published *The Jewish Faith: Its Spiritual Consolation, Moral Guidance, and Immortal Hope* (1846), a fictional collection of epistles between a Jewish woman and a younger Jewish girl who contemplates Christian conversion. This was only a year after Disraeli created his own Jewish sage, Sidonia, in *Coningsby*. Both Disraeli and Aguilar shared a concern in the 1840s with negotiating the place of Diaspora Jews in England, and articulating a robust narrative of Jewish exceptionality that remained compatible with, and indeed, related to, the uniqueness of England.[42]

Indeed, both Benjamin and Sarah Disraeli remained active in the Anglo-Jewish literary sphere. In the late 1850s Sarah Disraeli, then fifty-seven years old, wrote to Baroness Charlotte de Rothschild (wife of Baron Lionel de Rothschild) to commend her on a book of Jewish sermons for children that she has delivered at the Girls' Free School in Bell Lane and privately published.

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[40] Hughenden MSS 243/1 9/1/2, Grace Aguilar to Isaac D'Israeli, 29 July 1840.
[41] See Scheinberg, *Women's Poetry and Religion in Victorian England*, pp. 146-89. For Aguilar's participation in Romantic Christian literary discourse, see also Elizabeth Fay, 'Grace Aguilar: Rewriting Scott Rewriting History' in Spector (ed.), *British Romanticism and the Jews*, pp. 215-34.
[42] See Page, 'Anglo-Identity and the Politics of Cultivation in Hazlitt, Aguilar, and Disraeli' in Spector (ed.), *The Jews and British Romanticism*, pp. 149-64. Page argues that as a convert, Disraeli sees the rightful place of Semites in Palestine, whereas Aguilar attempts to create a connection between Jews and the British landscape. Nevertheless, the suggestion stands that both Disraeli and Aguilar engaged in a similar Romantic/Jewish literary project.

> I have read your little volume with sympathy and admiration; the tone of tenderness which pervades the addresses and their devout and elevated feelings must touch the hearts of all of every creed. I had the gratification to read one aloud last evening (on the holiness of the Sabbath). It's piety and eloquence deeply touched my auditors who had put aside their Barrow and their Stillingfleet to listen.[43]

Sarah emphasized the Jewish Sabbath and the fact that her hearers had cast aside their Stillingfleet, the seventeenth-century Anglican theologian, in favour of the Jewish sermons. Rothschild's homilies focused on the exceptionality of the Israelite people, the holiness of the Sabbath, and the importance of following the instructions of Holy Scripture in all aspects of Jewish life.

It becomes necessary to place Disraeli into both Jewish and Romantic spaces in nineteenth-century literary culture not only to gain a more illuminated understanding of his novels but also, crucially, because he placed himself there, as did contemporary critics. Rather than reading his novels as symptomatic of Disraeli's quest for power, interest in the Orient, or Byronic Romanticism, contemporary reviewers critiqued Disraeli's fiction as he hoped they would: as an earnest attempt at something approaching metaphysical literature. In May of 1833, in *The Examiner's* review of *Alroy*, the critic compared Disraeli's work to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.[44] *The Athenaeum* regarded the novel as an earnest attempt at poetic merit and noted especially the extent to which it drew on Jewish and biblical themes.

> Wild as his work is assuredly – extravagant sometimes to our utmost wish, and supernatural even to the very limits of poetic belief; but then genius is stamped on every page . . . Nor is this all – there is a deep infusion of the spirit of Judah in it – not the fallen and money-changing spirit of these our ladder days, but of that martial and devout spirit which kindled in the Hebrew bosoms of old, when their daughters sang 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'. We have been moved as we were in our youth, when, with the Bible on our knees, we sat wondering over the doings of the heroes of Israel. Carmel is again before us, and Jerusalem with all her banners.[45]

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[43] RAL 000/11/, Sarah Disraeli to Baroness Lionel de Rothschild, 9 Oct., Year Unknown. See Stanley Weintraub, *Charlotte & Lionel: A Rothschild Love Story* (London, 2003), pp. 135-47.
[44] *The Examiner* no. 1319 (12 May 1833), p. 293. See also *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* no. 37 (Mar. 1833), pp. 342-6, in which another critic deemed that Disraeli's prose 'a certain and meretricious abruptiveness of style, which we cannot persuade ourselves to admire; hence, too, much of a poetical rhythm' but conceded that this was 'evidently *intended* by the author (and not the result of negligence).'
[45] *The Athenaeum*, no. 280 (9 Mar. 1833), pp. 150-1.

Fourteen years later, Disraeli published *Tancred* (1847), which, like *Alroy*, took place in the Holy Land and dealt with religious morality. Reviewers, however outraged they may have been at the novel's seeming call to Eastern values, nevertheless took it seriously as a work of theological fiction. In an article entitled, 'The Hebrew, the Saracen, and the Christian', one critic was struck by the audacity of Disraeli's claims to spiritual authority: 'Now, how does it happen that Disraeli is irresistibly impelled to point at these objects of popular reverence, as Elisha did at the senseless idols of old, and say with bitter scorn, "These be your gods, O Israel!" What right has he to assume this tone of superiority?'[46] *Tancred* also registered as a kind of theological treatise in Jewish circles. A letter from a 'Jewish Youth' was among many that Disraeli received from Jews who thanked him for his contribution to Jewish apologetic.

> You, Sir, have nobly proved yourself the champion of the Children of Israel . . . To you, Sir, be the gratitude and the admiration of the descendants of that once so [prominent] race who can find sufficient Light to illumine the obscure path on which they tread their way, in the holy traditions of their Fathers, in the fidelity which they bear to a Heaven-created Faith, in the remembrance of past days, and deed and glories.[47]

Disraeli's friend Lord John Manners wrote to him to congratulate him on his 'profound and soaring theological speculation of the Schoolmen'.[48]

If Disraeli sought to join the ranks of Donne, Milton, and Pope by writing a modern romance in the popular style of Byron and Shelley, the 'devout spirit which kindled in the Hebrew bosoms of old' was a fitting subject: his religious imagination suited the Romantic form. William Beckford perceived the earnestness of Disraeli's literary endeavor; he wrote of *Alroy*, 'What appears to be *hauteur* and extreme conceit in Disraeli is consciousness, uncontrollable *consciousness* of superior power'.[49] Yet these contemporary reviews stand in marked contrast to more recent analyses of the novel. Textual criticism, and the consequent interest in Disraeli's fiction as a repository for his political propaganda, has given theoretical

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[46] Hughenden MSS 227 E/IV/9D; the title of the magazine remains obscured, as this manuscript is only a fragment.
[47] *Ibid*., 234 E/VI/Q/25/121.
[48] *Ibid*., E/VI/Q/7/85.
[49] Qtd. in Jane Ridley, *The Young Disraeli* (London, 1995), p. 125.

backing to the age-old scepticism of his sincerity. Daniel R. Schwarz has argued, for example, that Disraeli's non-fiction historical annotations throughout the novel – in which Disraeli used the voice of a 'supremely confident intellectual'[50] – were part of a consciously constructed literary device that Disraeli used to satirize the notion of serious scholarship itself. Schwarz was so insistent on Disraeli's complete insincerity that he went as far as to consider 'whether the notes are in part an elaborate joke at the expense of readers apt to take the editor and themselves too seriously and accept as serious scholarship what is often mumbo jumbo. Is there not a note of deadpan humour in . . . the 1845 preface?[51] In the particular passage to which Schwarz refers, Disraeli took pains to establish the authenticity of his sources:

> With regard to the supernatural machinery of this romance, it is Cabalistical and correct. From the Spirits of the Tombs to the sceptre of Solomon, authority may be found in the traditions of the Hebrews for all these spiritual introductions. I believe that the character of Oriental life is not unfaithfully portrayed in these pages.[52]

As promised in the preface, Disraeli defined and explained the term 'Cabalist' and 'Cabalistical Magic' in a long footnote at the beginning of the novel. In the note – which spanned two pages – he cited '*Enfield, Philosophy of the Jews, vol. ii*', a cabalistic history by Dom Calmet, and the seventeenth-century Hebraist and biblical scholar John Lightfoot. Finally, he referred his readers to further reading: 'For many curious details of the Cabaistical Magic, *Basnage*, vol. v. p. 384, &c'.[53] This treatment of historical sources hardly seems satirical.

Indeed, Disraeli wrote of Jewish history with the same academic authority in non-fiction spheres. In August 1845 he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Morning Post* to defend

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[50] Spector (ed.), *Alroy*, p. 39.
[51] Daniel Schwarz '"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin": Jewish Perspectives in Disraeli's Fiction' in Endelman and Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 47.
[52] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 6.
[53] See Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 30, 31. Disraeli explains the origin of the character Jabaster as 'Simeon ben Jochai, who flourished in the second century, and was a disciple of Akibha, is called by the Jews, the Prince of Cabalists'. Disraeli also defined Cabala: '"The Hebrew word Cabala," says Dom Calmet, "signifies tradition, and the Rabbins, who are named Cabalists, apply themselves principally to the combination of certain words, numbers, and letters, by means of which they boasted they could reveal the future, and penetrate the sense of the most difficult passages of Scripture" […] – See *Calmet, art. Cabala*'. Disraeli also directed his readers to 'Lightfoot, vol. ii, p. 371'.

his claim in *Coningsby* (1844) that several of the early Jesuits were Jews. In his defense of his claims, he cited several sources, including an 'Escurial [. . .] Report on the Judaism of the early Jesuits' and 'Ranke, himself an authority, in his "History of the Popes"'.[54] Further, in his vindication of the truth of Jewish chosenness and the inherent Jewishness of Christianity in *Lord George Bentinck* (1852), Disraeli employed emphatically organized rhetorical argument. He presented the prevailing notion 'that the dispersion of the Jewish race is a penalty incurred for the commission of a great crime: namely, the crucifixion of our blessed Lord in the form of a Jewish prince' before he contested it – 'Upon this, it may be observed, that the allegation is neither historically true nor dogmatically sound' – and took the arguments in turn: '1. *Not historically sound*; 2. *Not dogmatically true*'.[55] There seems little evidence that Disraeli merely aimed to satirize the practice of historical scholarship or rhetorical argument; if anything, the evidence suggests that Disraeli counted himself as amply qualified to participate in it.

These blurred lines between fiction and non-fiction indicate something important about nineteenth-century literary culture. Disraeli and the writers who influenced him – both Jewish and Christian – participated in a literary tradition which, within the early novel form and also in poetics, in Simon Goldhill's words, began to 'understand itself as the endpoint of historical development'.[56] Disraeli possessed a nineteenth-century literary imagination which saw the contemporary present as participating in an ongoing cycle of religious and providential history, and yet somehow also contributing to the culmination of it. As Hans Frei has demonstrated, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interpretation of Scripture changed from the view that the Bible contained one cumulative narrative that described and included the present world, to an increasing 'distance between the biblical narrative and the real world'.[57] The novel form flourished at this moment in nineteenth-

[54] See *BDL*, iv, pp. 180-1, Disraeli to the Editor of the *Morning Post*, 16 Aug. 1845.
[55] Benjamin Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: a political biography* (London, 1905), pp. 314-19.
[56] Simon Goldhill, *Victorian Culture and Classical Antiquity: Art, Opera, Fiction, and the Proclamation of Modernity* (Princeton, 2011), p. 17.
[57] Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, 1974), p. 10.

century thought precisely because it allowed writers to explore paradigmatic biblical patterns that continued to assert primacy over morality and public thought, while also satisfying a post-Enlightenment need for critical engagement, reinterpretation, and self-reflection.[58] In Disraeli's use of the Bible in his fiction, he engaged in this very experimentation and sought to reimagine biblical truths and narratives as they might be applied to his particular historical moment.

[58] For contemporaneous shifts in Jewish biblical interpretation, of which Disraeli may well have been aware, see Jacob Shavit, *The Hebrew Bible Reborn: From Holy Scripture to the Book of Books, a history of biblical culture and battles over the Bible in Modern Judaism* (Berlin, 2007).

II.

Disraeli and Scripture

The legend of Menahem ben Solomon, or 'David Alroy', a Jewish Messiah figure who campaigned to recapture the Holy Land from the reigning Turkish Caliphate in the twelfth century, was originally attributed to Moses Maimonides, the Sephardic philosopher and Torah scholar in twelfth-century Egypt. The most recent editor of the novel, Geoffrey Harvey, does not explicitly name Disraeli's source, but bases his discussion of the legend on *The Itinerary of Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela,* published in English by A. Asher in 1840.[59] But Disraeli must have used Maimonides as his source, given that *Alroy* was published in 1833.

Disraeli read Maimonides during his period of depression in the winter of 1829-30, in which he supposedly read books about Judaism and the Middle East in his father's library at Bradenham cloistered himself in his father's library at Bradenham.[60] Isaac D'Israeli's notebooks on Maimonides' works included 'Maimonides on the Study of the Law: A Treatise', in which he copied portions of Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishna*, and also 'A Dissertation on Maimonides and His Works'. Among these notebooks were a few pages, in Isaac's hand, on the state of the Hebrews in the twelfth century and a certain family called the the 'Alrois', who,

> had succeeded in tracing an uninterrupted [. . .] descent from the royal stem of David, and a tradition had long run in the family that they should await with patience for the Holy Man who would come at the end of ages [. . .] An Alroi was the Prince of Captivity.[61]

There was also a notebook entitled, 'David El Roi: A Tale of the Cabbala' which comprised disparate notes and fragments of narrative about the legend. It seems probable that Isaac's

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[59] See Disraeli, *Alroy*, xii-xiv. Maimonides as the source for *Alroy* was also substantiated by Weintraub, *Disraeli*, p. 112.

[60] *Ibid*., p. vii. See also *M&B,* i, 193-4; and Benjamin Disraeli, 'General Preface' in *Lothair* (London, 1870), in which Disraeli claims that he had begun *Alroy* in 1827 but had 'thrown the manuscript aside' until he was in 'Jerusalem in the year 1831, and visiting the traditionary Tombs of the Kings, my thoughts recurred to the marvelous career which had attracted my boyhood'. See Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli: a biography* (London, 1993), p. 112 for a longer discussion of Disraeli's composition of the novel.

[61] Hughenden MSS 266/1, fols. 9-15.

collection of Maimonides' works, together with his notes, were Disraeli's primary sources for his own version of the Alroy story.

In June of 1830, six months after his depressive winter rummaging in his father's library, Disraeli and his friend William Meredith departed on a tour of Gibraltar, Spain, Malta, Turkey, Albania, Greece, Jerusalem, and Egypt. Disraeli returned to England in the summer of 1831 and must have composed *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* between his return and March of 1833, when the first edition of the novel was published by Saunders and Otley.[62] In 1846, Henry Colburn published a heavily revised version – called simply *Alroy* – in which Disraeli omitted his passionate dedication to his sister, and wrote a new preface to replace the scholarly foreword that had accompanied the early copies. This could explain why recent historians lost sight of the earnestness of Disraeli's endeavour to engage with Jewish history: many of them could have been using an edition of the text which had no scholarly introduction.

Contrary to the dominant idea that Disraeli used the novel purely as an exercise in Byronic Romanticism, in his reconstruction of Maimonides' legend, Disraeli created his hero as a new David, or Saul, or Solomon, and modelled Alroy's trajectory on the Old Testament scheme of Hebrew kingship. Though it is set in twelfth-century Baghdad, the opening scene of *Alroy* establishes it as an allegorical recasting of the Deuteronomic history.[63] The books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings share ideological notions, including the threat of idolatry, the emphasis that there is only one God of Israel, the centrality of the succession founded by David, and the necessity of an obedient centre of faith in the form of Jerusalem.[64] These themes constitute the moral message of *Alroy* almost entirely. Further, the narrative arch of the novel includes the three main aspects of Hebrew kingship. First, the Hebrew king is chosen by God, called to kingship, and anointed. Then, in the Old Testament,

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[62] The last print run in Disraeli's lifetime came in 1871, when Longmans published the novel as part of the collected works. For *Alroy*'s sales and reception, see Harvey, *Alroy*, p. xi. *Alroy* was published again in 1927 as part of the *Bradenham Edition of the Novels and Tales of Benjamin Disraeli, 1st Earl of Beaconsfield*, with an introduction by Philip Guedalla. Geoffrey Harvey edited a 2004 edition for the Pickering & Chatto series of Disraeli's early novels, and Sheila A. Spector edited a 2005 online edition as part of the digital *Romantic Circles* series.

[63] See Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (eds.), *Reconstructing Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (Indiana, 2000).

[64] See Michael D. Coogan (ed.), *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford, 2007), p. 310.

God leads Hebrew monarchs through a kind of temptation or exile that exposes and reinforces the king's chosen-ness and protection from God. But the Hebrew king is tempted – variously, through non-Jewish marriage and/or idol-worship – which causes him to disobey his covenant with God and fall from kingship, thereby sending Israel again into a state of captivity or estrangement from God. Following this path, Alroy eventually falls from obedience into the temptations of hubris, disobedient intermarriage, and idolatry. Disraeli made explicit Alroy's biblical inheritance: he is regularly referred to as 'Son of David', and when confronting his fate as Prince of Captivity at the beginning of the novel, Alroy proclaims for the first of many times throughout his tale, 'Lord of Hosts! Let me conquer or die! Let me conquer like David, or die, Lord, like Saul'.[65]

This extensive use of Scripture demonstrates that Disraeli intentionally worked through the novel's priorities and inquiries – the truth and limits of religious orthodoxy as a personal and national value system – within the Old Testament discourses of kingship, redemption, temptation, and betrayal. The novel shows him engaged with Scripture, the efficacy of Jewish laws and rituals as he understood them, and the ways in which it gave birth to the religion he would come to profess in church. Indeed, Disraeli must have been exposed to the Deuteronomic history in Church each Sunday; in the nineteenth century Sunday morning readings would have come from 'The Order for Morning Prayer' rather than the Eucharistic Lectionary.[66] Further, his extensive, but imprecise use of biblical material demonstrates J.A. Froude's description of Disraeli's theology: it wavered and evolved, but it was deeply grounded in religious tradition as Disraeli understood it. In *Alroy* Disraeli merged the kingship narratives of anointment and temptation in the books of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, with the earlier leadership of Moses and the exile in Egypt sequence in Exodus. In addition to portraying Alroy as the new Saul, David, or Solomon, Disraeli drew strong

[65] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 4.
[66] For the liturgical calendar of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer see Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer* (Oxford, 2011), 219-233; for changing engagement with the Book of Common Prayer see Bryan D. Spinks, 'The Book of Common Prayer in the Nineteenth Century' in Stephen Platten and Christopher Woods (eds.), *Comfortable Words: Polity, Piety and the Book of Common Prayer* (London, 2012), pp. 98-120.

parallels between Alroy and Moses, and between Alroy and the prophet Elijah. Alroy's spiritual leader Jabaster echoes the biblical Samuel, who anoints Saul and David.

Alroy opens with a transfer of power from one Hebrew ruler to the next in the Davidic succession, which recalls the persistent theme of the search for the Israelite king in the Hebrew Bible. David Alroy's uncle Bostenay is the 'Prince of Captivity': the leader of the Jews under the Caliphate rule. In the opening scene, Bostenay celebrates a procession of the Jews in tribute to their Muslim superiors. In his description of the procession, Disraeli placed the Jews' captivity into the biblical model of Israelite exile:

> The cornets sounded a final flourish as the Prince of Captivity dismounted from his white mule, his train shouted as if they were once more a people and had it not been for the contemptuous leer which played upon the countenances of the Moslemin bystanders, it might have been taken for a day of triumph rather than of tribute.[67]

The antagonism between the oppressed Jewish people and the leering 'Moslemin' captors echoes the oppositional relationships in the book of 1 Samuel: between Israel and the wicked sons of Eli, who were 'corrupt; they did not know the Lord'; and between Israel and the Philistines, who defeat Israel in battle and capture the sacred ark of the covenant, just as the Caliphate hold the Jewish people captive in *Alroy*.[68]

In Bostenay's opening soliloquy, he compares the imperfect joy of the Jews in captivity to their unfettered triumph during key episodes in their biblical history. After Samuel is called by God and blessed by Eli the priest, Israel is defeated in battle by the Philistines, who kill Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and capture the ark of the covenant, which is the symbol of God's presence and protection of Israel in battle. When Eli hears this news, he falls dead. His daughter in law, the late Phinehas' wife, gives birth to a son. The passage reads, 'And she named the child I-chabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken'.[69] Bostenay's introductory exclamation in

[67] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 9.
[68] See 1 Samuel 2:12; 1 Samuel 4. All biblical citations are taken from The Authorized Version.
[69] See 1 Samuel 4:21-22.

Alroy echoes and inverts the lamentation of Phinehas' wife at the birth of Ichabod (meaning, 'no glory'):[70]

> The glory has not departed! . . . It is not as the visit of Sheba unto Solomon; nevertheless the glory has not yet departed . . . That last flourish was bravely done. It was not as the blast before Jericho; nevertheless it told that the Lord of Hosts was for us. How the accursed Ishmaelites started! Did you mark, Caleb, that tall Turk in green upon my left? By the sceptre of Jacob he turned pale! Oh! it shall be a day of rejoicing and thanksgiving! . . . It was not as the great shout in the camp when the ark returned, but nevertheless, it was boldly done, and showed that the glory had not departed . . . the God of our Fathers hath been our refuge.[71]

Bostenay compares his procession to the glory of Bathsheba's visit to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:19; to the flattening of the walls of Jericho in Joshua 6; and to the returning of the ark of the covenant in 1 Samuel 6.

From the outset, then, Disraeli unequivocally marks Alroy's story as a symbolic continuation of the events of the Hebrew Bible. Bostenay passes the kingship to Alroy and assures him that 'our God will not desert you, an orphan child, and born of royal blood'. Alroy, a naïve and zealous opponent of compromise within oppression, launches into a dramatic deliberation about the integrity of ruling from captivity in which he identifies himself with David and Saul: "'Hark! the trumpets that sound our dishonor. Oh! but that they sounded to battle! Lord of Hosts! Let me conquer or let me die! Let me conquer like David, or die, Lord, like Saul'". He despairs of the lost glory of Israel in prayer and enlists himself as a descendent of sacred kings who could come forward as Messiah:

> God of my fathers! – for indeed I dare not style thee God of their wretched sons – yet by the memory of Sinai let me tell thee that some of the antique blood yet beats within these pulses, and there yet is one who fain would commune with thee face to face – commune and conquer.
> And if the promise unto which we cling be not a cheat, why let him come, come, and come quickly, for thy servant Israel, Lord, is now a slave so infamous, so woe-begone, and so contemned [sic], that even when our fathers hung their harps by the sad waters of the Babylonian stream, why, it were Paradise again to what we suffer.[72]

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[70] John Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, 2004), p. 231.
[71] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 9. See Deuteronomy 33:27: 'The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms'.
[72] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 12-13.

Alroy's call for a saviour reflects not only the desire of Israel for a king in the Deuteronomic history of the Old Testament, but also messianic expectation. This problematizes Hannah Arendt's assumption that Disraeli distanced himself from the traditional Jewish expectation for a Messiah. The twelfth-century legend of Alroy was essentially a messianic story, and Disraeli engaged the theme explicitly, imbuing his narrative with biblical references to Hebrew expectation.

Alroy's lament creates the opening for him to fill; he will become an Old Testament leader – an amalgamation of prophet, priest, and king. He exclaims: '"The old captivity was empire to our inglorious bondage. We have no Esther now to share their thrones, no politic Mordecai, no purple-vested Daniel. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"'[73] This foreshadows Alroy's own rise as a warrior-like Mordecai, his communion with the prophetess Esther, and his eventual failure, which is predicted by a new Daniel who foresees Alroy's fall from favour on the evening of Alroy's wedding to the Caliph's Muslim daughter. But as Spector demonstrated, Alroy's despair at the fallen state of Israel also creates the opportunity for him to become a Messiah who will spiritually redeem his people: he will anticipate the salvation of Christ.

In addition to conflating Judeo-Christian understandings of redemption, Disraeli switched between different biblical episodes in his narrative. After Alroy's conflicted-kingship monologue, Lord Alschiroch, the brother of the Sultan, attacks Alroy's sister, Miriam. Just as Moses kills an Egyptian and flees to Midian in Exodus 2:12, Alroy abruptly and scandalously kills Alschiroch and flees to the desert. Alroy is then portrayed as a figuration of the prophet Elijah, who in the book of 1 Kings, audaciously denounces the worship of the Canaanite god in defense of the God of Israel. Like Elijah, Alroy's retreat to the wilderness is an act of defiance against enemy worship. As God feeds Elijah during the drought by sending ravens who provide food, so Alroy is provided 'a bunch of fresh and fragrant dates' by a 'lonely bird

[73] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 13-15.

singing in the wilderness!'[74] Alroy exclaims, '"As thou didst feed Elisha, so also has thou fed me, God of my fathers!"'[75]

Disraeli went on to amalgamate Old and New Testament imagery in the sequence in which Alroy is called by God and anointed. When Alroy arrives in the cave of Jabaster the Cabalist, he changes from the role of the prophet Elijah in the desert, to an archetype of God's chosen kings, Saul and David. Disraeli describes Alroy's calling to kingship and Jabaster's role as anointer with direct biblical reference: in Alroy's 'vision of calling' Disraeli portrays the image of the Hebrew warrior alongside imagery from the New Testament book of Revelation. Alroy describes to Jabaster his spectacular vision of himself as chieftain of a heavenly army. He was awoken from sleep by a vision in which he stood on a mountain and beheld a burst of light in the sky, followed by a heavenly company:

> 'Oh! not when Saul led forth our fighting men against the Philistine, not when Joab numbered the warriors of my great ancestor, did human vision gaze upon a scene of so much martial splendour. Chariots and cavalry, and glittering trains of plumed warriors too robust to need a courser's solace; streams of shining spears, and banners like a sunset; reverend priests swinging their perfumed censers, and prophets hymning with their golden harps a most triumphant future. "Joy, joy," they say, "to Israel, for he cometh; he cometh in his splendour and his might, the great Messiah of our ancient hopes." And, lo! a mighty chariot now appeared, drawn by strange beasts, whose forms were half obscured by the bright flames on which they seemed to float. In that glorious car a warrior stood, proud and immovable, his form, his countenance – hold my hand, Jabaster, while I speak – that chieftain was myself!'[76]

When Alroy awakens from his vision of the celestial chariot, he hears a 'small still voice' akin to the episode in 1 Kings 19:12 in which Elijah encounters God in the wilderness, not in the natural elements, but through his voice: 'but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice'. Further, Alroy's response to God – '"Lord, I am here, what wouldest thou?"' – echoes both

[74] 1 Kings 17:2; Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 28.
[75] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 29.
[76] *Ibid*., p. 37.

Isaiah's response to his vision of the Lord of Hosts – 'Here am I, send me'– and Samuel's: 'Speak, for thy servant heareth'.[77] These biblical references each appear in Alroy's testimony:

> 'A small still voice descended from above and called "Alroy!" I started, but I answered not. Methought it was my fancy. Again my name was called and now I murmured – "Lord, I am here, what wouldest thou?" Nought responded, and soon great dread came o'er me, and I rushed out and called to thee, my master'.[78]

Similarly, Jabaster's anointing of Alroy recalls Samuel's anointing of David and Saul. Jabaster becomes one who, in Collins' words, 'anoints kings and can also declare that they have been rejected by God'.[79] Like Samuel, part of Jabaster's spiritual mission is his selection of a king for Israel. After the ark is returned to Israel in the book of Samuel, God tells Samuel that he will anoint Saul 'captain over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come unto to me'.[80] In the same vein, Jabaster anoints Alroy as God's chosen one, calling him 'the only hope of Israel . . . my pupil and my prince!' Jabaster affirms Alroy in his new mission: '"Restore the covenant, restore the ark, restore the holy city"'. Alroy's specific aim of restoring the ark is part of his his kingly mission; just as in the book of Samuel, the sequence of the ark is embedded within the monarchy narrative. Alroy's pursuit of the ark connects him once more to Moses, as the ark originated when God told Moses to make an ark of wood as a tablet for the covenant in Deuteronomy 10:1-5.

In his anointing scene, Alroy also recollects the figure of David. Like David, Alroy is an unexpected elect: he is young and weak. He frantically prays, 'Lord! I will do thy bidding. I am young, I am very young, O God and weak; but thou, Lord, art all-powerful'.[81] Alroy's unlikely chosen status as the new king of the Israelites reflects 1 Samuel 16, in which God tells Samuel that he has 'provided me a king among [Jesse's] sons'. Samuel assumes that God

[77] See Isaiah 6:8 and 1 Samuel 3:10. Disraeli owned a copy of Robert Lowth's (1710-87) *Isaiah* (London, 1778).
[78] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 37.
[79] Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, p. 230.
[80] See 1 Samuel 9:16.
[81] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 33.

has chosen Eliab, one of Jesse's strong and older sons. But God surprises Samuel by directing him to the youngest son, David, whose appearance is youthful and healthy:

> Now he was ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.[82]

Jabaster identifies Alroy as the new David explicitly: 'Did not his great ancestor, as young and as untried, a beardless stripling, but with a pebble, a small, smooth stone, level a mailed giant to the ground, and save his people?'[83] Alroy exclaims to his own Samuel, '"Jabaster, Jabaster! . . . The Lord hath spoken . . . Repose and I have nought in common now. Farewell for ever to that fatal word. I am the Lord's anointed"'. Jabaster responds, as does the narrator of Samuel, that '"The Spirit of the Lord hath fallen upon him. Son of David, I adjure thee tell me all that hath past"'.

In crafting the scene in which Jabaster symbolically anoints Alroy by dipping his head in water – 'Drink of the fountain, David, it will restore thee' – Disraeli alluded to Samuel's anointing of David. The chosen David was 'of a beautiful countenance'; Jabaster proclaims Alroy's similar beauty and further compares him to Solomon: 'How solemn is his visage in the moonlight! And yet not Solomon, upon his youthful throne, could look more beautiful'. Further, Alroy's plea in Jabaster's cave, '"Then, Jabaster, believe as fully I am the Lord's anointed"'[84] replicates the biblical narrative when David spares Saul in his cave: 'I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he *is* the Lord's anointed'.[85]

Jabaster further embodies a prophet based on Samuel when he warns Alroy that he will be tempted like the Hebrew kings before him:

> But for him great trials are impending. Not lightly must that votary be proved, who fain would free a people. The Lord is faithful to his promise, but the Lord will choose his season and his minister. Courage, and faith, and deep humility, and strong endurance, and the watchful soul temptation cannot sully: these are the fruits we

[82] See 1 Samuel 16: 1, 12-13.
[83] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 35.
[84] *Ibid*., pp. 35, 36-7.
[85] See 1 Samuel 24: 10.

> lay upon his altar, and meekly watch if some descending flame will vouchsafe to accept and brightly bless him.

True to the thematic progression in the Old Testament, in *Alroy* Disraeli ensured that Alroy's chosenness is inextricably bound up with his capacity for temptation and sinfulness. As soon as Jabaster proclaims Alroy the new king – "'He is clearly summoned. The Lord is with him. Be he with the Lord, and we shall prosper'" – and sends him forth on his mission to restore Israel, he warns that Alroy will face many trials. When Alroy leaves Jabaster to seek the Sceptre of Solomon, Jabaster repeats God's words to Moses in Exodus 3:6: 'God be with thee, sacred boy: the God of our great fathers – the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob'.[86]

Just as the biblical Solomon whom he represents, Alroy confronts his temptation into lust, foreign worship, and disobedience. When he falls famished and exhausted in the desert on his way to the Tomb of Kings, Lord Honain, the physician of the reigning Caliph, revives Alroy and reveals himself as the brother and foil of Jabaster, who has taken on a new identity as an assimilated Turk: "'I assumed their turban, and I am – the Lord Honain'". From this point in the novel, Lord Honain's identity as a prosperous Turk illustrates to Alroy the allure of the expedient, and the success that can arise from sacrificing religious principles. Lord Honain's philosophy of compromise becomes attractive to Alroy when Alroy falls in love with the Caliph's daughter, Princess Schirene. In his fall into temptation, Alroy resembles the mischievous Solomon; he is no longer the fresh-faced and faithful young David, determined to carry out God's will. Instead, he departs to Jerusalem convinced that can enact both God's will and his own. He plans to attain Solomon's sceptre, conquer the Holy City, and bypass Jewish law to marry Schirene, despite the fact that it is forbideen by law: "'I'll confront the greatest of my diademed ancestors, and in his tomb. Mighty Solomon! he wedded Pharoah's daughter. Hah! what a future dawns upon my hope'".

Alroy's subsequent fall from righteousness follows the narrative patterns of Saul's trials in the books of Samuel and Solomon's in the books of Kings. Just as the prophet/king relationship between Samuel and Saul grows in tension and opposition, throughout Alroy's

[86] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 38-9.

succeeding military conquests he increasingly turns his back on the faithfulness and purity represented by Jabaster in pursuit of military and political expediency in the style of the pragmatic Lord Honain. When Jabaster promotes Abidan – 'a valiant warrior' and 'a true son of Israeli' – in the battle against Bagdad, Alroy spitefully declares, '"let me have men about me, who see no visions in the mid-day sun. We must beware of dreamers"' to which Jabaster replies, '"Dreams are the oracles of God . . . There was a time when your Majesty thought not so ill of visions"'.[87]

So theologically un-attuned have been Disraeli's historians, that they often interpret this temptation sequence in *Alroy* as merely a feature of the medieval romance genre, while entirely missing the blatant allusions to biblical kings. Monypenny made no reference to Disraeli's biblical allusion at this stage in the novel; instead, he assumed that Disraeli's plot mandated that 'after manifold sufferings and adventures, [Alroy] arrive[d] [in Jerusalem]'; and that later, when 'Alroy's good fortune is at an end; his enemies begin to close upon him'.[88] Endelman attributed this section of the story to Disraeli's 'urge to validate the primacy of imaginative experience, as opposed to worldly, rational calculation, in human affairs'.[89] These scholars construe Alroy's conflict between between temptation and righteousness as evidence of Disraeli's moral inquiry into the the dilemma of expediency versus imagination, in a secular sense. But in *Alroy* Disraeli did not construct a secular moral deliberation that takes place modern England; rather, he specifically and conspicuously situated it within this theological tension in the Hebrew Bible. This very tension between pragmatism and expediency is a central theme in the same Old Testament narratives upon which Disraeli modelled *Alroy*. As John Collins argues,

> The clash between Saul and Samuel can be viewed from [an]other angle . . . a conflict between two theologies. Samuel represents the ethic of unconditional obedience, while Saul represents a moderate pragmatism. From the viewpoint of the Deuteronomists, the trouble

[87] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 64, 75, 141.
[88] *M&B*, i, p. 195
[89] Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end"' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, p. 114.

> with kings was that they took things into their own hands instead of deferring to the word of God as revealed by the prophets.[90]

Disraeli's emulation of these biblical themes is seen as Alroy grows more hubristic in his kingship and ignores Jabaster's wisdom, just as Saul distances himself from Samuel. When Alroy increasingly acts according to his own desires, rather than obeying the covenant – "'The sceptre of Solomon! It may be so. What then? Here's now the sceptre of Alroy'" – Jabaster warns him that his upcoming marriage to the non-Jewish Princess Schirene will lead to his downfall: "'thy heart is turned from thy father's God, and hankers after strange abominations'".[91] Amid Alroy's protestations and attempts to convince Jabaster that his marriage is God's will, Jabaster warns Alroy that he is betraying the covenant by turning his back on the law: "'Sire, Sire, the legend that come from Sinai is full of high instruction . . . Thou hast his sceptre, but without his wisdom – 'tis but a staff of cedar . . . Sire, you may be King of Bagdad [*sic*], but you cannot, at the same time, be a Jew'".

Alroy's inter-marriage and desire to bring about political alliances through his marriage is modeled on the unlawful marriage of King David to Bathsheba, and also on King Solomon, who entered into marriages with several foreign women. Accordingly, Alroy rejects Jabaster's warning and says, "'I'll pit my inspiration against the prescience of my ancestors. I am also a prophet, and Bagdad shall be my Sion . . . I am the Lord's servant, not Jabaster's'". He insists that Jabaster too rigidly follows Mosaic law: "'Jabaster, is this a synagogue? Come I to a council of valiant statement or of dreaming Rabbis? For a thousand centuries we have been quoting laws we dared not practice'".[92] This directly recalls the Samuel and Saul sequence in Deuteronomy, in which a tension arises between strict adherence to commandments, and a reformed, more practical observance.

The Hebrew Bible portrays causal relationship: ritual obedience causes success, and disobedience causes failure, especially in military battles. This becomes the model for Alroy's disobedience of Jabaster and the prophetess Esther, who warns him, 'Enter not into Babylon".

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[90] Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, p. 233.
[91] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 141, 153, 155.
[92] *Ibid*., pp. 156, 132.

Instead, Alroy defiantly conquers Baghdad; this disobedience sets his downfall and broken covenant into motion. He attempts to persuade Jabaster that marrying Princess Schirene will bring about conciliation between the Jews and Turks, but Jabaster ensures him that the law forbids the intermarriage: 'We must exist alone. To preserve that loneliness, is the great end and essence of our law . . . Can we pray with them? Can we eat with them? In the highest duties, and the lowest occupations of existence, alike we cannot mingle'.[93] In this scene, Disraeli clearly alludes to a major theme in the Old and New Testaments: to what extent are the people of God bound by the law received by Moses? However, this connection receives no recognition in the most recent literary study of Disraeli, in which Robert O'Kell argued that Alroy's disobedient marriage to Schirene indicates that Disraeli sought to work through his own psychological conflicts within the novel: '[*Alroy*'s] fantasy structure … proves that Disraeli was undertaking a reassessment of his behaviour'.[94] Even if Disraeli's assessment of Alroy overlay an appraisal of his own identity – his own position as a converted Jew, for example, or his desire to assume the role of an English aristocrat – it remains significant that Disraeli rooted his inquiry within these biblical moral issues. And it suggests that biblical morality was an important lens through which the young Disraeli mediated his own ideological formation.

Alroy's final fall from kingship and death further replicates the Old Testament discourses that govern the novel's narrative. When he ignores Jabaster's counsel, Alroy hears a 'wild scream in the gardens . . . "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!"'[95] Daniel interpreted the writing on the wall of Belshazzar's palace during his grand banquet; now Jabaster concludes that Alroy, too, "'is found wanting, he is weighted, and is indeed found wanting'" during his marriage celebration, which is described as hedonistic and erotic. Alroy's decline into luxury and excess is modeled on Solomon's extravagance. Solomon does not perform the rituals expected of a chosen king, which derives from 1 Kings 2:3: 'Keep the charge of the Lord your

[93] *Ibid*. p. 133.
[94] O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, p. 62.
[95] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 151, 156.

God, walking in his ways and keeping his statues, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses'. Analogously, in his new marriage Alroy routinely violates the law: '"He goes not to the sacrifice; they say he keeps no feast, observes no ritual, and that their festive fantasies will not be balked, even by the Sabbath"'.

Disraeli created Alroy's betrayal of his kingly covenant in the image of Solomon's; just as Solomon became an idolator, and just as he loved foreign whom God forbid him to marry, Alroy begins to worship the Caliph's god, rather than the God of Israel. After Alroy's wedding, the prophetess Esther, along with the young warrior Abidan – the new chosen one – each inform Jabaster that Alroy has formally betrayed his covenant with God by worshipping in the mosque; he '"has proclaimed himself Caliph . . . The Princess goes to mosque in state next Friday; 'tis said thy pupil doth accompany her"'.[96] But despite his descent into idolatry, Alroy, like Solomon, remains the chosen one. This suggests that Disraeli modelled his chosenness on the kingship contracts of the Old Testament. Abidan – God's new favoured one – suggests that to save Israel, they must conspire to kill Alroy, Jabaster hesitates because, like Samuel who anointed Saul, Jabaster knows the law of anointing:

> Anointing is a sacramental act by which a man destined for a special office – like that of priest, and particularly that of king – is demonstrably consecrated by God. In no Old Testament figure more than Saul is it clearer that this action stamps on the person concerned a special character, which never disappears. Even his later rejection does not alter the fact that he is the 'anointed Yahweh'.[97]

Accordingly, Jabaster claims, '"King or no King, he is the Lord's anointed. Shall this hand that poured the oil on his head, wash out the balmy signet with his blood! Must I slay him?"'[98]

However, just as Samuel is eventually persuaded to reject Saul and anoint David, Jabaster comes to realize that he must oust Alroy. Abidan convinces him,

> 'Oh, Jabaster! honoured, rare Jabaster! thou second Samuel of our light-headed people! There was a time when Israel had no King except their God. Were we viler then? Did Kings conquer Canaan? Who was Moses, who was Aaron, who was mighty Joshua? . . .

[96] *Ibid*., pp. 157, 168.
[97] H.W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: a commentary* (London, 1964), p. 84.
[98] Disraeli, *Alroy*, pp. 171, 181.

> Kings! Why what's a King? Why should one man break the equal sanctity of our chosen race?'

Because Alroy is a true Hebrew king, his rejection by his people and even by God does not alter his chosen status. This is seen when the prophetess Esther sneaks into Alroy's chambers to kill him: Alroy is symbolically protected from death by his covenant. Esther's dagger 'struck against the talisman which Jabaster had given Alroy, and which, from a lingering superstition he still wore'. After Jabaster is captured during the insurrection and killed, Alroy realizes that he has betrayed the covenant, "'Oh! my God, I have deserted thee, and now thou hast deserted me!'" He sees a vision of Solomon's sceptre and a heavenly procession bearing Jabaster's talisman; the vision ends when Jabaster's ghost hands the sceptre back to Solomon. The talisman round Alroy's neck 'crumbled into dust', which signifies the end of his kingship.[99]

When Alroy disobeys God, his military fortune comes to an end; this shows, again, that Disraeli modelled his Alroy's covenantal relationship with God on those of the kings in the Hebrew Bible. Alroy is defeated in battle against the rebel forces and re-enters Baghdad: he and Israel are once again in a state of captivity. However Disraeli preserved Alroy as a spokesman for the salvation of Israel, and mostly redeems him at the end of the novel. Lord Honain – the embodiment of foreignness and betrayal of Jewish law – claims that Alroy must "'renounce our faith and bow before their prophet". Alroy refuses: "'Say what they will, I am the Lord's anointed. As such I should have lived, as such at least I'll die'". Alroy reconciles with his sister Miriam before he dies a martyr's death; "'I am full of faith. The Lord hath pardoned me. Be sure of that . . . The God of Israel is my refuge. He saved our fathers in the fiery furnace. He will save me'".[100] Alroy's final words evoke David's in 2 Samuel 22: 'And David spake unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies . . . "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer . . . my refuge, my saviour'". Alroy's martyrdom, in addition to paralleling the Old Testament kings, also transforms him into a Messiah figure.[101] Before he is beheaded in the square of the

[99] *Ibid*., pp. 228-9.
[100] *Ibid*., p. 236.
[101] See Spector, *Alroy*, p. 9.

Grand Mosque in Bagdad, Alroy defiantly declares, '"So much for blasphemy; I am true to a deep faith of ancient days which even the sacred writings of thy race still reverence . . . I raised the standard of my faith, by the direct commandment of my God, the great Creator of the universe"'.[102] Through maintaining Alroy's faithfulness and repentence to the end of the story, even while the biblical cycle of captivity continues, Disraeli expressed the hope that the religious promise of salvation would continue, perhaps in the modern world.

Disraeli was asked by Saunders and Otley to extend *Alroy*, as it was too short for their model of three volumes. The result was the small novel, *The Rise of Iskander*, which Disraeli wrote in one week and published alongside *Alroy* in 1833.[103] *Iskander* similarly demonstrates both Disraeli's biblical reading and the inextricability of Judaism and Christianity in his religious mind. Like *Alroy*, *The Rise of Iskander* is a novel about a virtuous hero fighting to restore religious purity in a land in which he has become captive. This time, Iskander is a Greek Christian hero who has been raised in the hands of his father's enemy, the Muslim Turkish ruler Amurath the Second. Historians from Monypenny and Buckle to David Cesarani have argued that Iskander's Christian triumph in the novel, so soon after Alroy's failure to restore Israel and his death, demonstrates Disraeli's partiality to Christian conversion and indicates his rejection of Judaism.[104]

But there are some glaring problems with this understanding of the relationship between the two novels, as well as the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in Disraeli's thought. Disraeli introduced *The Rise of Iskander* at the end of *Alroy*'s preface:

> To the Tale of Alroy I have added the history of a Christian hero placed in a somewhat similar position, but achieving a very different end; and I hope the reader will experience the pleasure of an agreeable contrast in the Rise of the great Iskander.

Disraeli's desire to give his readers 'the pleasure of an agreeable contrast' by writing a tale of triumph for a Christian hero was far from a strident statement of Christian triumphalism and

[102] Disraeli, *Alroy*, p. 242.
[103] See Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli* (London, 1993), pp. 137-8.
[104] See *M&B*, i, pp. 203-4 and David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (New Haven, 2016), pp. 57-61.

conversion, and accordingly, Jewish condemnation. On the contrary, the fact that these two novels appeared together, as part of a unified fictional meditation on religion and nationalism, suggests that Disraeli distinguished little between the theological differences within Judaism and Christianity.

What does arise from the differences between the two novels is Disraeli's source material for each. His engagement with the Bible and Jewish mythology in *Alroy* becomes more interesting by contrast to his lack of similar interest in Christian traditions in *The Rise of Iskander*; the latter contained none of the careful research and precision of *Alroy*. As we have seen, in *Alroy* Disraeli cited the historians John Lightfoot, William Enfield, Augustin Calmet, and Jacques Basnage (*The History of the Jews, from Jesus Christ to the Present Time*). He took pains to vindicate the historical veracity of Alroy's story, as well as the 'supernatural machinery of this romance', which he declared 'is Cabalistical and correct'. In his Christian tale, Disraeli made no such effort to understand or engage with ancient Christian traditions. He loosely based *Iskander* on the tale of the Albanian Christian Skanderberg, which he had probably lifted from reading Gibbon. *Iskander* contains no citations or footnotes, and has markedly less biblical material than *Alroy*. This seems to suggest that, despite Frietzsche's claim that Disraeli was 'not a Jew of the Torah', as well as Cesarani's and Endelman's insistence that he had no interest in religious Judaism, in the 1830s Disraeli sought to engage more explicitly with, and make sense of, his Jewish heritage, rather than with the Christian faith he would come to defend and practice.[105] Indeed, Cesarani's claim that 'those who wish to depict him as a proto-Zionist because he "identifies with Alroy's triumphs" must explain why he did not identify equally with Iskander', misses the point that it is not in Disraeli's personal identification with either hero that we find his religious interests. Rather, the engagement with Jewish texts and Scripture in *Alroy*, far more than in *Iskander*, demonstrates where Disraeli's intellectual interests were placed at this moment in the 1830s.

[105] Frietzsche, *Disraeli's Religion*, p. 16.

Nevertheless, *The Rise of Iskander* demonstrates the potency of the theme of the religious chosen one, and shows that Disraeli applied this theme both to narrative of Jewish kingship, as well as the trope of the Christian Messiah figure. Like Alroy, Iskander proves himself to be a gallant warrior of faith: he maintains a secret Christian practice within his captivity by Turkish Muslims. This drives his military success and moral purity: '"There is a God who fashions all things. He will not desert a righteous cause. He knoweth that my thoughts are as pure as my situation is difficult"'. Throughout the story, Iskander acts as a Christ-figure; but as Disraeli conflated different biblical models in his writing of *Alroy*, so did he fashion Iskander in the model of several different biblical heroes. For example, Iskander's father, the Prince of Epirus, was invaded and conquered by Turkish forces under Amurath the Second, who killed all of his sons except Iskander. Like the biblical Joseph, who is favoured among his family, the 'beauty, talents, and valour of the youngest son [Iskander], saved him, however, from the fate of his poisoned brothers'. As Joseph was adopted and promoted within the Pharaoh's ranks, similarly, 'Iskander was educated at Adrianople, in the Moslemin faith, and as he, at a very early age, exceeded in feats of arms all the Moslemin warriors, he became a prime favourite of the Sultan, and speedily rose in his service to the highest rank'.[106]

When the story begins, Amurath's army, who have conquered most of Europe, have finally been challenged and defeated by Hungarian and Polish Christians, led by the famous John Hunniades. Disraeli based him on the real fourteenth-century Hungarian commander Janos John Hunniades, who was defeated by the sultan Amurath. Iskander, who has 'long meditated on the exalted duty of freeing his country' and restoring his secret Christian faith to glory, becomes the mythological hero when he betrays the Turkish army to join Christian forces in secret. He becomes '"a champion of the Cross"' who vows to fight for '"my God, my country, and my lawful crown"'. This illustration bears a strong resemblance to the marriage of monarchical, constitutional, and ecclesiastical values that characterized the ethos of the Young England novels, begun a decade later in 1844. We begin to see that in these early

[106] Disraeli, *The Rise of Iskander*, ch. 2.

religious novels, Disraeli created a dialogue between the Hebrew Bible, and present-day England; the religious plots and biblical themes of *Alroy* and *Iskander* laid the foundation for the Young England novels which came later. Each set of novels explore the religious provenance of good government and the unattainability of a healthy society without religious faith. What is surprising, and what has been overlooked for too long, is the extent to which Disraeli penetrated these themes within conspicuous biblical frameworks.

Despite this clear inextricability between Disraeli's political and religious thinking in the 1830s and 1840s, it has been consistently overlooked in assessments of Disraeli's novels. O'Kell described the central theme of both *The Rise of Iskander* and *Tancred* as 'the conflict between principle and expediency, or altruism and betrayal'.[107] O'Kell's analysis, like many others, divorces two themes that Disraeli took pains to unify: political leadership and religious faith. Alroy's and Iskander's triumphs derive directly from their commitment to their contracts with God and their obedience of religious laws. On the eve before his victorious military campaign against the Turks, for example, the Christian princess Iduna endows Iskander with a rosary from the Holy Sepulchre, claiming, '"wear it for the sake and memory of that blessed Saviour who died for our sins"'.[108]

Under this explicit religious protection, Iskander becomes uncannily accomplished as a warrior and as the political leader of a new nation; as is the case for biblical kings, his religious covenant causes his success. In his first attempt to help Hummiades and the Christians conquer the Turks, he succeeds. In addition to fashioning Iskander as a Hebrew king, similar to Alroy, Disraeli also experimented with Iskander as a Christ figure. In an effort to rescue Hummiades' daughter Iduna, who has been taken prisoner by the Turks, Iskander disguises himself as an Armenian physician and immediately adopts the skills of a Christ-like healer: 'As Iskander felt pulses, examined tongues, and distributed drugs and charms, he listened with interest and amusement to the conversation of which he himself was often the

[107] Robert O'Kell, 'Disraeli's "Coningsby": Political Manifesto or Psychological Romance?', *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 23, (1979), p. 59.
[108] Disraeli, *The Rise of Iskander*, ch. 12.

hero'.[109] In healing the sick and tending to the needy and poor, Iskander not only emulates Christ; he also exercises the ideal functions of a paternalist landlord: he cares for his people and sacrifices his own welfare for the betterment of his inferiors. This illustration of the Christ-like Iskander as the ideal religious practitioner, along with the tried and tempted Hebrew king Alroy, suggests that Disraeli moulded his political and social ideals out of the biblical personas of the Old and New Testaments.

The manifold representations of Iskander demonstrate the span of Disraeli's reference to biblical and ancient narratives. He further modelled Iskander on Christ in the sacrificial offering of his own life in exchange for the redemption of Princess Iduna, who falls ill during her captivity by the Turks. Iskander pleads admittance to her chamber on the grounds that he has a magical talisman that can cure her. Disraeli conflated Iskander's Christ-like qualities – he virtually raises Iduna from her deathly illness as Christ does Lazarus – with the trope of Roman *pietas* (or Greek *eusebeia*), the concept of duty as the leading principle in the lives of heroes in the Greco-Roman world. When Iskander begins to fall in love with Iduna, for example, he resists his feelings because of both his 'sincere friendship for Nicæus', the young Prince of Athens who is also in love with Iduna, and because of 'his conviction that it was his present duty to concentrate all his thought and affection in the cause of his country'.[110] This shows Disraeli's interest in the morality of the ancient world as a didactic tool for his own country, in which religious and political faith was found wanting.[111]

Just as in *Alroy*, in *Iskander* Disraeli explores the threat of temptation to individuals and nations who betray their covenants. He was interested in the consequences of what he would come to see as 'infidelity' to one's creed and country. In *Iskander*, he demonstrates this through Nicæus, who becomes the foil of Iskander. Nicæus falls into lustful jealousy when he

[109] *Ibid.*, ch. 8.
[110] *Ibid.*, ch. 12.
[111] In collating the themes of obedience to the law in the Hebrew Bible and *pietas* Disraeli was not inaccurate; *pietas* formed a central moral value in the lives of early Christians and in the doctrines of the early church. See Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: the Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (London, 2000).

realizes that Iduna reciprocates Iskander's love. Just as Alroy becomes increasingly lustful and selfish, and loses sight of his chosenness, Nicæus loses sight of his Christian mission:

> The emancipation of his country, the welfare of his friend, even the maintenance of his holy creed, all those great and noble objects for which, under other circumstances, he would have been prepared to sacrifice his fortune and his life, no longer interested or influenced him.[112]

By contrast, Iduna and Iskander are portrayed as ideal Christians: devout and sacrificial. Iduna befriends an Eremite, whom she calls 'holy father' and together they embark on a pious routine of attending matins.

Further, the imagery surrounding religious duty in the novel recalls the connection between fertile land and moral righteousness in the Bible. In helping Iskander on his mission to restore Christianity to Greece, Nicæus and Iduna are surrounded by images of 'the happy plans of a Christian country. With joyful spirits they descended into the fertile land, and stopped at a beautiful Greek village, embowered in orchards and groves of olive-trees'.[113] Conversely, when Nicæus becomes enraged at Iduna's refusal to marry him, he holds her prisoner in a cold stone castle, which is painted in sharp contrast to the fertile lands outside. Iduna would hear 'the sound of a bell or the sign of some holy emblem, [which] assured her she was in a Christian land' but she cannot access any of the bounty outside of her cell. This imagery, alternating between fertile soil when the characters are righteous, and stark, barren scenes when they are wicked, echoes a prominent biblical theme. The Old Testament in particular, which we know Disraeli read closely, presented fertile land as a reward for obedience to God. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet warns that the arrogant and oppressive will be punished – 'The glory of his forest and his fruitful land the Lord will destroy' – while the righteous will be rewarded: 'The desert and the dry land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus. They will burst into bloom'.[114] This connection to biblical narrative patterns again exhibits the extent of Disraeli's engagement with Scripture as he

[112] Disraeli, *The Rise of Iskander*, ch. 18.
[113] *Ibid.*, ch. 15.
[114] Isaiah 10:18, 35:1.

wrote his early novels. When we read these texts closely and with a biblical awareness, claims such as Cesarani's, that Disraeli's novels 'are hardly indicative of a young man's struggle with his religious and ethnic identity', reveal themselves to be even more misjudged and emblematic of a period of historical writing which imposed cynical designs on Disraeli at the expense of a consideration of his religious ideas.[115]

Yet Disraeli did not confine his biblical allusion to these early and obscure novels. In *Tancred* (1847), he again placed his hero within a biblical narrative and at the sites of major religious events. In placing Tancred in these spaces, in which he receives religious revelation, Disraeli transformed the biblical mythology of Judaism and Christianity from the theoretical into the active. Tancred laments the hollowness of doctrine in England and recognizes in himself an un-activated faith. When he finally arrives in Jerusalem, he activates that faith by re-enacting biblical scenes.

In the Holy Land Tancred retraces the steps of key events in the life of Jesus Christ and Moses. Book III opens with the narrator's description of an emphatically biblical setting:

> The broad steep of Sion crowned with the tower of David; nearer still, Mount Moriah, with the gorgeous temple of the God of Abraham, but built, alas! by the child of Hagar, and not by Sarah's chosen one . . . the moonlight falls upon Bethesda's pool; further on, entered by the gate of St. Stephen, the ee, though 'tis the noon of night, traces with ease the Street of Grief, a long winding ascent to a vast cupolaed pile that now covers Calvary, called the Street of Grief, because there the most illustrious of the human, as well as of the Hebrew, race, the descendant of King David, and the divine Son of the most favoured of women, twice sank under that burden of suffering and shame which is now throughout all Christendom the emblem of triumph and of honour.[116]

Such a survey of the theological and biblical history of Jerusalem ensured that Disraeli's readers comprehended the fullness of Tancred's figuration of both Christ and Moses in his subsequent action throughout the novel. Indeed, in the next chapter Tancred announces, 'I must go to Gethsemane'.[117] He is led to Gethsemane and to 'the path on the right [that] leads to Bethany'. Tancred's next move directly emulates Jesus' in the same garden.

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[115] David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (New Haven, 2016), p. 32.
[116] Disraeli, *Tancred*, pp. 172-3.
[117] *Ibid*., p. 186.

> 'Leave me now', said Tancred. There are moments when we must be alone, and Tancred had fixed upon this hour for visiting Gethsemane, because he felt assured that no one would be stirring. Descending Mount Sion, and crossing Kedron, he entered the sacred grove.[118]

Tancred's desire to be alone recalls Jesus' words to his disciples in Matthew 26 and Mark 14: 'Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder'.[119] From the garden, Tancred comes forth, 'his face flushed with the rapt stillness of pious ecstasy; hours had vanished during his passionate reveries, and he stared upon the declining sun'.[120] He takes note of the Mount of Moriah, where in Genesis 22, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac.

In walking the path that leads to Bethany, Disraeli further retraces the steps of Jesus at his entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and recalls Jesus' blessing of the disciples there before his ascension in Luke 24. Tancred's Christ-like journey is interwoven with imagery from the Old Testament. On the path to Bethany, he winds 'round the southern side of the Mount of Olives', where King David weeps at the Jewish burial ground in 2 Samuel. He sees on the Mount of Olives 'a procession of women bearing classic vases on their heads, who had been fetching the waters of Siloah from the well of Job'.[121] Their head vases recall the group who cover their heads with the biblical David on the same mountain.

> And David went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.[122]

At the end of this path on which Tancred has physically passed through major events in the Old and New Testament, he reaches the enchanted garden in which the Jewess Eva will articulate the interconnection between Judaism and Christianity. Disraeli described the moment that Tancred discovers the garden as his entry into a mystical space. Tancred crosses a threshold – a 'portal' – into a preserved biblical world.

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[118] *Ibid.*, p. 187.
[119] See Mark 14:32 and Matthew 26:36.
[120] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 189.
[121] *Ibid.*, p. 191.
[122] 2 Samuel 15:30.

> As he approached the garden, Tancred observed that its portal was open: he stopped before it, and gazed upon its lemon trees with delight and curiosity . . . an eastern garden, a garden in the Holy Land, such as Gethsemane might have been in those days of political justice when Jerusalem belonged to the Jews; the occasion was irresistible; he could not withstand the temptation of beholding more . . . and he entered.[123]

This moment solidifies Tancred's position in the novel as a reimagined David or Jesus. Just as in *Alroy*, Disraeli leads Tancred through alternating biblical narratives. The novel reaches its apex when Tancred assumes the position of the new Moses and receives a message from an angel atop Mount Sinai. Perhaps more than any prophet, Moses embodied the theocratic principle; the idea that God directly transmits His will to human leaders. The angel transmits to Tancred, 'The equality of man can only be accomplished by the sovereignty of God. The longing for fraternity can never be satisfied but under the sway of a common father . . . Cease, then, to seek in a vain philosophy the solution of the social problem that perplexes you'. Just as God commands Moses to 'tell the children of Israel', the new law, the angel beseeches '"Announce the sublime and solacing doctrine of theocratic equality"'.[124] As God appeared to Moses – 'Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever' – the angel appears to Tancred as 'a sound, as of thunder' and in a 'dimness . . . shadowy and fleeting'.[125] After Moses receives his law, he 'went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes'.[126] By contrast, when Tancred comes down from Mount Sinai, 'he descended the mountain: at its base, near the convent, were his slumbering guards, some steeds, and crouching camels'.[127] By purposefully juxtaposing Tancred's descent with Moses', Disraeli indicated towards the difficulty, indeed, the impossibility of materializing biblical revelation in Tancred's time. The spell is emphatically broken, the portal shut, when Tancred sees his 'slumbering guards' and is reminded of his precarious and foreign status in the Holy Land. Nevertheless, by endowing

[123] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 190.
[124] *Ibid*., pp. 298-9.
[125] *Ibid*. See Exodus 19.
[126] Exodus 19:14.
[127] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 300.

Tancred with a new law for European government, in the manner of a divinely-instated religious creed, and by enthroning him as a new prophet of the modern age, Disraeli experimented with the idea of the theocratic potential within the contemporary imagination.

Disraeli's extensive engagement with the thematic structure of the Hebrew Bible challenges the dominant interpretation that, as Blake phrased it, 'his theological ideas were, in reality, the rationalization of his own psychological dilemma'.[128] Nothing about Disraeli's careful compilation of source material or his copious allusion to the Bible suggests that these novels were simply introspective. Rather, his citation of ancient and biblical texts demonstrate not only his interest in religious traditions, but his desire to work out his ideas about contemporary politics and society through those traditions. His complex conflation of biblical and theological discourses in *Alroy* suggests that the novel can be interpreted as Disraeli's scrutiny into the truth, but also the limits, of religious orthodoxy as a personal and national value system, not merely as a pragmatic leadership tool. In *Alroy* and *The Rise of Iskander* Disraeli imagined post-biblical nations that remained governed by biblical laws and by their divinely-instated theocracy. In *Tancred* he interrogated the plausibility of a union between Judaism and Christianity and between the Holy Land and Europe. The fact Disraeli can be understood, upon closer investigation, to have held a deep interest in biblical morality dramatically problematizes his portrayal as an unprincipled and religiously indifferent thinker. Through his texts Disraeli made it known, unequivocally, that he rooted his understanding of the universe and the nations in, as he put it, the 'word of God', which 'is eternal, and will survive the spheres'.[129]

[128] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 204.
[129] Disraeli, 'General Preface' in *Lothair* (London, 1870), p. xvi.

CHAPTER 3

FAITH

> 'It is time to restore and renovate our communications with the Most High. I, too, would kneel at that tomb; I, too, surrounded by the holy hills and sacred groves of Jerusalem, would relieve my spirit from the bale that bows it down: would lift up my voice to the heaven and ask, What is DUTY, and what is FAITH? What ought I to DO, and what ought I to BELIEVE?'[1]

Disraeli's thought arose out of a nineteenth-century religious culture that was dynamic, broad, and changing. Chapter 1 demonstrated that public debates in nineteenth-century England took place along the theological, biblical, and ideological fault lines that clearly run through Disraeli's fiction and non-fiction throughout his career. Chapter 2 has argued that Disraeli, writing within a religious literary sphere, reimagined the Bible in his fiction and placed the ideological questions facing his own generation into explicitly biblical narratives. This chapter now considers three further aspects of Disraeli's religious thought: ideas, practice, and doctrine.

The first section begins by exploring an ideology that was fundamental to Disraeli's religion: he believed that England had a moral and religious problem. He shared this concern for the religious brokenness of England with many thinkers of the period, including Carlyle, Maurice, Ward, Kingsley, Arnold, and scores of others. The thought of the Oxford Movement also resonated with Disraeli because he too yearned for religious and political wholeness, and orthodoxy, in an age of seeming fragmentation and liberalism. In his Young England novels, Disraeli, like the Tractarians, the Cambridge Camden Society, and many Romantic and Victorian authors, turned to the Middle Ages as an era of seeming unity and concord. Within this paradigm of nineteenth-century medievalism, Disraeli invoked the antiquity and sanctity of Judaism, as well as the notion of the Holy Land, as religious and ideological guides for the England he felt had strayed from its purpose. In *Tancred*, Disraeli represented Judaism as

[1] Disraeli, *Tancred or, The New Crusade* (London, 1927), p. 55.

the specific theological and ritualistic formula that could re-instil faith and order on the English people. This comprised a kind of 'figurative Zionism' throughout Disraeli's work: Judaism and Israel became emblematic of the return to a faithful and English nation.

The second section turns to Disraeli's conception of chosenness. The notion of the great individual – the great leader who would rise up and deliver the nation back to its truth – was often connected to the widespread longing for religious regeneration in this period. Romantic poetry seemed to exalt the individual genius as the great arbiter of morality. Carlyle epitomized the Victorian celebration of the 'chosen one' in his lectures in 1840, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*. As we have seen, Disraeli expressed considerable interest in the paradigm of the 'poetic genius' in his early writing. The theme of 'the great man' was central to Disraeli's literature in the 1830s and 1840s. His admiration for quixotic leadership and perception of himself as a prophetic leader has been discussed at length in secondary literature, but Disraeli's notion of the 'chosen one' has never been explored in connection with Judaism and Christianity. Like Carlyle, Disraeli's idea of the 'great man' depended on religious righteousness and adherence to moral duty. In *The Young Duke* (1829) and *Contarini Fleming* (1832), both heroes are born with exceptional qualities; but they only succeed when they align their genius with religious obedience, and view their leadership as part of a larger plan for their nations, in keeping with the biblical pattern of exile and deliverance. In both novels Disraeli juxtaposes the genius that is without religious guidance with the 'chosen one' who follows his ordained path towards delivering the nation. This was another integral idea to Disraeli: he mistrusted the self as an instrument of judgement or morality. The individual must define himself, and derive his morality from, Christianity, Judaism, and the Church, rather than the empty forces of 'progress'.

How might we define Disraeli's religious practice? Working under the broad argument that his religious 'practice' fell along many intellectual, political, and artistic fault lines – fictional and narrative practice, the rise of anthropology and 'racial science', the threat of scientific materialism, and the renegotiation of the role of religion and church to society at large – the third section considers the notion that beyond his regular church attendance,

Disraeli practised a vigorous form of 'lived religion'. It argues that Disraeli shared with other thinkers an emphasis on a practical, applied Judeo-Christian religious faith, rooted in the parish, that was inextricably bound up with good citizenship and social order. Just as he promoted the idea of the Jewish theocracy, in which religious principle welded itself to the law of the land, Disraeli wrote extensively about the salience of religious and political duty in Roman Catholicism. Like Judaism, he viewed Catholicism as a creed of action and antiquity, which retained access to purer connection with Christ through an unbroken institutional lineage. In *The Young Duke*, *Contarini Fleming*, and *Sybil*, Roman Catholicism embodies the reverence, mysticism, faithfulness to ritual and tradition, focus on parish life, and social order that England lacks.

The critical tides in interpretation of Scripture and doctrine against which Disraeli protested throughout his life would also influence his religious ideas in no small portion. The fourth section explores Disraeli's interest in the threat of 'Neology' and suggests that Disraeli possessed a broad, relatively agnostic and emphatically un-dogmatic notion of religious faith. While he decried the 'infidelity' of the writers of *Essays and Reviews* and regretted the theological storms caused by German biblical criticism, the forces of textual criticism, of Enlightenment rationality, and of Romantic individualism shaped Disraeli's conception of religious faith. These were paradigmatic structures in which he necessarily thought. As we have seen, Disraeli was aware of the Reform Movement within Judaism, which emphasized the need to modernize rituals and doctrines in order to preserve a core Jewish identity and practice in a changing religious space. Both Isaac D'Israeli and, in turn, Benjamin, reflected at length on the difference between the nucleus of the Christian or Jewish idea – the simple truths that, as Carlyle put it, 'a man does practically believe' – and the various doctrinal departures that developed over time and in different nations. Mitigating the distance between religious orthodoxy and reformed thought and practice constituted a considerable element of Disraeli's religious project.

Indeed, Disraeli was not a rigid doctrinal thinker. While he actively participated in public debates over theological and ecclesiastical change, he regarded doctrinal rows within

the church as knots that needed disentangling so that the Church could become whole, rather than crucial theological matters that could determine salvation. He portrayed Judaism, Catholicism, and Anglicanism as different permutations of an essential religious truth, and invoked the specific theologies and rituals of each church as correctives to England's moral failures. Building on this understanding of Disraeli's broad idea of Judeo-Christian religious practice, the final section reassesses one of Disraeli's final novels, *Lothair* (1870). It suggests that Disraeli's main anxiety about the intellectual and ecclesiastical landscape by 1870 was not the sectarian threat of encroaching Roman Catholicism – as recent scholars have claimed – but rather, the danger that scientific accounts of creation and humanity would supersede traditional theological constructions of morality and the self. Darwin published *On the Origin of the Species* in November 1859. It was followed four months later by *Essays and Reviews* (1860), seven essays by liberal clergymen who challenged biblical literalism and promoted rationalist, critical, and scientific approaches to faith and the Bible. *Lothair* was Disraeli's answer to these perceived threats to religious institutions and religious ideologies. Rather than advocating or condemning a particular religious creed, the novel encouraged belief – of some kind – in the face of unbelief. From the 1830s to the 1870s, Disraeli's novels centred on this: that the self and the nation are incomplete without God, and without the consequent religious morality that must govern their course in history.

I.

Figurative Zionism

In January 1851, Edward Stanley, the son of the 14th Earl of Derby, went to stay with Disraeli at Hughenden. Disraeli wrote to his sister Sarah at Bradenham, 'Young Stanley's visit to Hughenden, though hurried, was very agreeable . . . We walked to Denner Hill and its sylvan neighbourhood, and on Sunday, after church, we walked on the hills in view of Dashwood's Park, till we got to West Wycombe Church'.[2] Their walks through fields and churches instigated a memorable conversation between them; so memorable, that Stanley carefully recorded its contents in his diary and labelled them, 'These hasty notes of Disraeli's conversations I keep as curious. They are accurate, being set down at the moment'.[3] Stanley recorded in detail his conversation with Disraeli about Judaism, Palestine, atheism, and the future of Christianity and religion in the world, given the burgeoning physical sciences that by 1851, which seemed to Disraeli to shake the foundations of religious authority.[4] Disraeli's views, as dictated to a twenty-five year old Stanley, contained several of Disraeli's most fundamental religious ideas: the sanctity of Judaism, the importance of religiously-inspired 'chosen' individuals, and the idea that religion, in Froude's words with reference to Disraeli, 'grows and cannot be made', and must adapt itself to a changing world in order to survive.[5]

In his talk with Stanley, Disraeli explained his understanding of European Jewish history – 'the Jews who come from the shores of the Mediterranean are Sephardim, and look down on the rest' – and referred to the German historian Jacob Burckhardt (1818-97), according to whom, some Hebrews had 'received only the five books . . . they had migrated before the time of Prophets!'[6] This led Disraeli to detail his enthusiasm for restoring the Jews for Palestine. According to Stanley,

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[2] *BDL*, v, p. 404, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 22 Jan. 1851.
[3] *BDL*, vi, Appendix.
[4] Vincent drew on this same conversation in his chapter on Disraeli's religion: see John Vincent, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 38-45.
[5] J.A. Froude, *Life of the Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1890), p. 171.
[6] *BDL*, vi, Appendix. See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Greeks and Greek Civilization*, ed. Oswyn Murray (1872; London, 1998); Idem., *The Age of Constantine the Great (Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen)* (1853; London, 2007).

> He then unfolded a plan for the restoring the nation to Palestine – said the country was admirably suited for them – the financiers all over Europe might help – the Porte is weak – the Turks/holders of property could be bought out – this, he said, was the object of his life – great energy in tone and manner – 'Rothschild says I have given them up – it is not true – I can help them better in this way than in any other'. He thought the merchants would not go themselves, but send younger sons &c (He seemed to think he had said too much, and drew back into himself). . . I have often recalled it to mind, and been perplexed by, this very singular conversation: he never recurred to it again: his manner seemed that of a man thoroughly in earnest.[7]

Disraeli's admission clearly left an impression on the young Stanley. He recorded in his diary both later in this same entry in 1851, and again in 1853, that Disraeli expressed an interest in writing a *Life of Christ* 'from the national point of view': presumably a *Life* that emphasized Jesus' identity as an Israelite.[8]

However, Disraeli left little evidence that he had any political or practical intention of restoring the Jews to Israel. Some twentieth-century commentators, such as Nahum Sokolow, regard Disraeli's purchase of the Suez Canal shares in 1875 as the beginning of a long political road which would end in a Jewish homeland.[9] But most historians have agreed that it would be a mistake to think of him as a proto-Zionist in any real sense. We must be careful, however, not to dispense with the importance of Disraeli's ideas about Israel, even if we recognize them as abstract.[10] For Disraeli, Zionism was emblematic. In his fictional and non-fictional work, he portrayed the Jews as racially imbued with religious purity and as part as the beneficiaries of an uninterrupted relationship with God through the ages. The Young England group into which he entered in the 1840s created itself as a vocal group to express the widely held perception that England had lost a similar kind of connectedness to God and that this same

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[7] *BDL*, vi, Appendix. For another discussion of this conversation, see J.R. Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party: The Political Journals of Lord Stanley 1849-69* (Sussex, 1978), pp. 31-3.
[8] See Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party*, pp. 33, 106-7.
[9] Nahum Sokolow, *History of Zionism, 1600-1918* (2 vols., London, 1919), i, p. 143. See also Tony Kushner, 'One of Us? Contesting Disraeli's Jewishness and Englishness in the Twentieth Century' in Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London, 2002), pp. 202-51 for the contexts to claims about Disraeli and Zionism.
[10] See Michael Polowetzky, *Jerusalem Recovered: Victorian Intellectuals and the Birth of Modern Zionism* (Connecticut, 1995); Donald Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge, 2010).

religious fallen-ness contaminated its political ethics. As Tancred put it, "'enlightened Europe is not happy. Its existence is a fever, which it calls progress. Progress to what?"[11]

Judaism was a living, breathing example of an unbroken, 'unmixed' religious community; it encapsulated the religious polity that England needed to regain. Indeed, embedded in the Jewish notion of the homeland was the central idea of exile and return, on which Jewish history itself was based. To Tancred's outcry, 'Progress to what?', Judaism offered the answer, 'To return' or 'To redemption'.[12] It offered the spiritual corrective to the 'condition of England' question and filled the void that opened when European peoples began governing themselves in accordance with their own ethics, rather than by sacred law. A restored Israel symbolized a return to obedience, a revitalized morality, a nation – in his mind, the England nation – recovered to its direct promise of salvation.

The notion of 'Israel' that Disraeli imagined and re-created in his fiction called expressly upon Isaac D'Israeli's illustration of the separateness and purity of the Hebrew race, within a literary culture in which Israel widely emblematized the prototypical ancient nation. As we have seen, in *The Genius of Judaism*, D'Israeli argued that Judaism's 'genius' throughout history was its cohesion between political leadership and divine worship.

> The first government of the Israelites was a THEOCRACY; a government unexampled in the annals of mankind. [Josephus] was so perplexed to describe the spiritual and mysterious government of the Jewish people, that [he] for this purpose combined two Greek words in the term . . . Theocracy, or God's rule; a government administered by men, but the sovereignty was held by the Divinity. The Jewish history, therefore, resembles that of no other people, for it combines divine with human events; a law received from Heaven more closely connects the human being with the Creator, and this people are therefore distinguished as 'the chosen'.[13]

Disraeli emphasized the virtue of the Jewish theocracy over and over again in his fiction, as the means to creating a new and restored Israel, a cohesive and religious obedient nation, in England. Hence his imaginative re-enactment of Old Testament kingship in *Alroy*. Disraeli designed Alroy's kingship as an example of theocracy: his duty as leader is to administer God's

[11] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 224.
[12] See David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 3-20.
[13] Isaac D'Israeli, *The Genius of Judaism* (London, 1833), pp. 28-9.

law in order to fulfil the prophecies that have been promised to Israel. He claims, '"The Lord, who knoweth all things, hath deemed me worthy of his mission. . . the Lord of Hosts hath found me not unworthy of his charge, I have established his ancient people, his altars blaze with sacrifices, his priests are honoured . . . his omnipotent unity is declared"'.[14] It is easy to imagine that he thought of his own narrative in *Alroy* when he told Stanley of his dedication to restoring Israel to Palestine. He also had the Jewish theocracy on his mind when he argued persistently and consistently for total cohesion of Church and State in the debates over disestablishment in the 1830s and 1840s.

In the intellectual and imaginative context of Young England, Disraeli wrote another version of the same story in *Tancred*, in which the hero discovers that the only chance of restoring religious faith to England lies in its implementation of this sacred Jewish theocracy. Tancred is religiously restless and disillusioned with the Church of England. It 'should be under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit', he tells Sidonia, but after meeting with an ineffectual bishop, he came 'to a conviction of what I had for some time suspected, that inspiration is not only a divine but a local quality'.[15]

> I would appeal to that Comforter promised to man, on the sacred spot on which the assurance of solace was made. I require a Comforter. I have appealed to the holy influence in vain in England. It has not visited me; I know none on whom it has descended. I am induced, therefore, to believe that it is part of the divine scheme that its influence should be local; that it should be approached with reverence, not thoughtlessly and hurriedly.[16]

By local religious qualities, Tancred meant 'specific': qualities specific to the Holy Land, and to the particular religious ethos of Judaism. Judaism, in its original locale, provided a portal to a purer state of nationhood, to the self's relationship to God, and to, as D'Israeli had put it, the theocracy which remained unrivalled in the annals of human government. This portal was only accessible through religious revelation and not through political legislation. Thus

[14] Benjamin Disraeli, *The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (London, 1833), p. 154.
[15] *Idem*., *Tancred*, p. 125.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 127.

Tancred embarks on a spiritual pilgrimage, rather than running for political office. The purpose of his pilgrimage is to give form and substance to his un-activated faith.

> 'I have passive faith. I know that there is a Deity who has revealed his will at intervals during different ages; but of his present purpose I feel ignorant, and therefore I have no active faith; I know not what to do, and should be reduced to a mere spiritual slothfulness, had I not resolved to struggle with this fearful necessity'.[17]

Tancred finds in Judaism an animated religion, a living antiquity, and a living Bible. As Isaac D'Israeli had established, and Disraeli learned, 'With the Israelite Everything is Ancient and Nothing is Obsolete'.[18] Judaism was a religion of antiquity and action. Each word in Hebrew had its root in a verb; the very language was imbued with action and with the importance of ritual, through which a living connection with God was sustained. The Holy Land embodied this living reality. As Tancred walks the path to Bethany, he observes,

> What a landscape surrounds him as he moves! What need for nature to be fair in a scene like this, where not a spot is visible that is not heroic or sacred, consecrated or memorable; not a rock that is not the cave of prophets; not a valley that is not the valley of heaven-anointed kings; not a mountain that is not the mountain of God! Before him is a living, a yet breathing and existing city . . . over which the Creator alike of Assyrian kings and Egyptian Pharaohs and Roman Caesars, the Framer alike of the Desert and of Christendom, poured forth the full effusion of his divinely human sorrow.[19]

The geography of the Holy Land maintained the living connection to God. The unbroken continuity with biblical events ensured that ancient sites remained holy and sanctified. Tancred meditates on the persistent presence of religious sanctity in Jerusalem.

> And why is the church of the Holy Sepulchre a beacon light? Why, when it is already past the noon of darkness, when every soul slumbers in Jerusalem, and not a sound disturbs the deep repose, except the howl of the wild dog crying to the wilder wind; why is the cupola of the sanctuary illuminated, though the hour has long since been numbered, when pilgrims there kneel and monks pray?[20]

The holy sites in Jerusalem enable Tancred to participate in a purer form of divine connection, stretching back to the Bible. The doctrine of theocratic equality announced to Tancred on

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[17] *Ibid.*, p. 260.
[18] See D'Israeli, *The Genius of Judaism*, p. 1.
[19] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 189.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

Mount Sinai culminates his re-enactment of the Old Dispensation and his symbolic attachment of ancient religious history to the present. Disraeli's vision for a reinstated Israel represented this joining of old and new religious eras and constituted the ultimate, symbolic rejection of the 'vain philosophy'. The symbol of a restored Israel operated universally, in re-aligning humanity to God.

Disraeli embedded this Jewish vision, and the doctrine of Jewish theocratic equality, within his notion of Christendom. If his body of fiction had one major intellectual concern, it could be argued that it sought to show the deep symbolic compatibility between Christianity and Judaism, and between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism. He did not promote a theology of conversion as much as he tried to imagine a productive cross-pollination between the faiths, at an ideological level. Priests in the Church of England were 'the successors of the apostles, [and] the steward of the mysteries of Sinai and of Calvary'.[21] He referred to Judaism and Christianity as the 'faith of Moses and Jesus'.[22] In *Tancred* the Jewess Eva convinces Tancred of the Judaism of Christ – 'he was born a Jew, lived a Jew, and died a Jew; as became a Prince of the House of David' – and the complete theological compatibility of of the two faiths. Eva introduced the arguments that Disraeli would deploy throughout the rest of his career, especially in his case in the House of Commons for the Jewish Relief Bill and in *Lord George Bentinck* (1851). In *Sybil*, the virtuous vicar of Mowbray, Aubrey St. Lys, explains to the hero Egremont the inextricable connection between Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Anglicanism. He claims that the 'Church of Rome is to be respected as the only Hebraeo-Christian church extant' and it has an 'early and apostolical character, when it was fresh from Palestine, and as if it were fragrant from Paradise'.[23] Judaism acts as common denominator between this ancient Roman Church, and the English Church. For both churches come from 'Our Master', who 'announced himself as the last of the prophets . . . For would you maintain then that the church did not exist in the time of the prophets? Was Moses then not a

[21] *Ibid*., p. 73.
[22] *Ibid*., p. 125.
[23] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 111.

churchman? And Aaron, was he not a high priest?'[24] These faiths were joined together through a shared covenant between the prophets, Christ, and the apostles. When Disraeli 'hinted' to Edward Stanley that 'his chief object in acquiring power would be to promote the return' of the Jews to the Holy Land, he had a particular notion of power and greatness in his mind, one that was indeed allied to the execution of religious duties and principles.

[24] *Ibid*., pp. 111-12.

II.

Chosenness

In Stanley's recollection of his conversation with Disraeli in 1851, he emphasized the centrality of the Messiah or prophet figure, to Disraeli's Jewish vision.

> Apropos of Asia, I said he ought to have the Foreign Office in order to gain information & influence on his favourite subject. Questioned whether the Jews would wish to return – this he allowed to be the great difficulty. Also the prejudice of the Sephardim against the others would have to be got over. 'Coningsby was merely a feeler – my views were not fully developed at that time – since then all I have written has been for one purpose'. The man who should restore the H. race to their country would be the Messiah – the real saviour of the prophecy'! He did not add formally that he aspired to play this part, but it was evidently implied. He thought very highly of the capabilities of the country, and hinted that his chief object in acquiring power here would be to promote the return.[25]

Stanley was right to hear Disraeli implicating himself into the role of the 'the Messiah – the real saviour of the prophecy!' The theme of 'the chosen one' or the special 'genius' remained central to Disraeli's literature and thought throughout his maturity. In 1952 Philip Rieff convincingly argued that Disraeli's idea of Jewish chosenness shaped his political vision of himself as a chosen one, and of England as a chosen nation. Rieff's conclusion is worth citing at length, as it has gone unnoticed in the dominant biographies and histories.

> Disraeli felt himself twice chosen, as a Jew and as an Englishman, a representative of the Old Testament and the New, the past and the present united. Disraeli was pleased to make his sense of chosenness the basis of his politics throughout his life. His belief in the mystery of Israel's chosenness gave him a basis for his belief in his own chosenness in English politics . . . Disraeli did not simply hint at the doctrine of election, he asserted it. And his prophecy to England was a romantic conservative vision . . . of England, that blessed plot, as a New Israel. It was Disraeli's nostalgia for his Jewishness that enabled him to present his vision in English political history.[26]

J.P. Parry came to a similar conclusion in his article 'Disraeli and England' (2000). He argued that, from a young age, Disraeli was 'fascinated by the concept of genius (on which his father wrote), and by the great men of history'. Parry maintained that in 'the 1830s and 1840s,

[25] *BDL*, vi, Appendix.
[26] Philip Rieff, 'Disraeli: The Chosen of History', *Commentary* 13 (Jan. 1952), p. 33.

[Disraeli] saw himself as a leader-in-waiting, an artist-prophet whose insights were needed in order to save the country from its foolish and humdrum opinions'.[27] More recently Robert O'Kell has argued that we should understand Disraeli's regard for himself as a leader-in-waiting as 'a form of compensation for failure or defeat by imagining transcendent success'.[28]

These interpretations of Disraeli and chosenness can be expanded to include a significant religious dimension which many other scholars have missed. Labels of the early novels as, in Michael Flavin's words, 'Disraeli's trilogy of selfhood', or in Daniel Schwarz's, 'metaphors of the self', have left us with a dominant reading of Disraeli's heroes as merely constructions of himself.[29] But with an appropriate reading of *Alroy*, it becomes plain that Disraeli's protagonists remained in the role of prophets of a New Israel, even when he put them in different situations and idioms. Each of the heroes has both aristocratic birth – as Rieff pointed out, Disraeli's 'image of the English aristocrat was struck off from the image of the [chosen] Jew' – and special spiritual qualities. In order to achieve individual greatness, the chosen genius must learn, somewhat paradoxically, that his own moral vision leads him to those 'vain philosophies' that damage the individual and nation; he must submit to the will of God in order to deliver both. Disraeli applied this explicit biblical lesson of *Alroy* across his fiction, especially in the Young England novels. As we shall see, even in *Contarini Fleming* (1832), a work which on the surface seemed to express Disraeli's purest attempts at Byronic Romanticism – in which the poet consciousness becomes the ultimate dictator of morality – he made his hero answerable to the religious tenets of Roman Catholicism.

The connection between the solitary hero and the religious Messiah was widely explored in nineteenth-century discourse, perhaps most notably through Thomas Carlyle's lectures *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* in 1841. Carlyle's theory of heroism epitomized a certain understanding history that had come into prominence by the mid-nineteenth century. He argued that 'the soul of the whole world's history' could be found

[27] J.P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), p. 702.
[28] O'Kell, *Disraeli*, p. 504.
[29] Michael Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse* (Sussex, 2005), p. 25. Daniel R. Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction* (London, 1979), p. 7.

in and explained by great men. The lectures were introduced and divided according to the eras in religious history to which the great men belonged – 'Was it Heathenism . . . Was it Christianism . . . Was it Scepticism, uncertainty and inquiry whether there was an Unseen World . . . ? – because a great man's religion was 'the great fact about them'.[30] Carlyle's lectures made clear that an exceptional spiritual power was the primary characteristic of the great man. He was not merely an effective leader, he was

> the living-fountain, which it is good and pleasant to be near. The light which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; and this not as a kingled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain, as I saw, of native original insight of manhood and heroic nobleness; – in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them.[31]

Disraeli shared Carlyle's notion of the great man, not only as a great political thinker or actor, but as especially endowed with religious wisdom. Carlyle painted the great man as a Christ figure, likening his power to that which was foreshadowed of Christ in Isaiah 9:2: 'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined'. Mankind participated in a great symbolism, and ultimately represented the revelation of God on earth: 'We are the miracles of miracles, – the great inscrutable mystery of God'. Christ himself was the ultimate great man of history: 'Hero-worship, heartfelt prostrate admiration . . . for a noblest godlife Form of Man, – is not that the germ of Christianity itself? The great of all Heroes is One – whom we do not name here!'[32] Disraeli shared with Carlyle the notion that there was a difference, in Patrick Brantlinger's words, between 'ordinary mortals, as institutionalized through religious orthodoxies and

[30] Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841; London, 2001), p. 6
[31] Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 1. For Carlyle's theory of heroism, see William W. Buckler, 'The Aesthetic of Seeing/the Morality of Being: Carlyle's Grand and Simple Insight into the Humanness of Heroism', *Prose Studies* 4 (1981), pp. 287-300; David J. DeLaura, 'Ishmael as Prophet: Heroes and Hero-Worship and the Self-Expressive Basis of Carlyle's Art' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 11 (1969): pp. 705-732. Robert A. Donovan, 'Carlyle and the Climate of Hero-Worship' *University of Toronto Quarterly* 42 (1973), pp. 122-41. See also Geraldine Higgins, *Heroic Revivals from Carlyle to Yeats* (Basingstoke, 2012) and Chris R. Vanden Bossche, *Carlyle and the Search of Authority* (Ohio, 1991).
[32] Carlyle, *On Heroes*, p. 1.

rituals, and . . . the heroes, geniuses, and prophets who found religions, nations, and empires'.[33]

Carlyle's theory arose out of a post-Enlightenment exaltation of personal agency and consequent Romantic exploration of the power of the individual consciousness, both of which manifested in the poetry of the period, in which Disraeli sought to make his mark. In *The Prelude or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* (begun in 1798), William Wordsworth translated the genre of the epic – which usually explored the dynamics of religious morality, as in Dante's *Inferno* or Milton's *Paradise Lost* – into an equally intense exploration of the growth of his own mind. This epitomized the early nineteenth-century Romantic fascination with the potential of the solitary mind: the genre of the epic moral inquest no longer took place in Hell or Paradise, but within the poetic mind, as the ultimate ethical and sensual apparatus.[34] Concurrent shifts in the understanding of history and historiography also contributed to the idea of the individual as a powerful agent. In his *The Roman and the Teuton* (1864) in Cambridge, Charles Kingsley argued, against the notion of Comtean positivism, that history was providentially determined through the actions of individuals.

> Without doubt History obeys, and always has obeyed, in the long run, certain laws. But those laws assert themselves, and are to be discovered, not in things, but in persons; in the actions of human beings . . . This may seem a truism: if it be such, it is one which we cannot too often repeat to ourselves just now, when the rapid progress of science is tempting us to look at human beings rather as things than as persons, and at abstractions (under the name of laws) rather as persons than as things.[35]

Kingsley saw dual governing principles at work: the continuous unfolding of history according to laws, and yet, the agency of persons. Indeed, the inherency of individual character

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[33] Patrick Brantlinger, 'Nations and Novels: Disraeli, George Eliot, and Orientalism', *Victorian Studies* Vol. 35, No. 3 (1992), p. 265.

[34] There is now a considerable body of literature on the religious dimensions of literary Romanticism. For the foundational work in this area, see Stephen Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: the tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian church* (Cambridge, 1979). On Wordsworth, see also J.R. Watson, *Wordsworth's Vital Soul: The Sacred and Profane in Wordsworth's Poetry* (London, 1982). For the idea of 'rapture' as a spiritual and religious transformation, see Cornelia Pearsall, *Tennyson's Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue*. (Oxford, 2008). For Catholicism and Romanticism, see Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778-1829* (Basingstoke, 2011).

[35] Charles Kingsley, *The Roman and the Teuton* (Cambridge, 1864), pp. xiii-xiv.

contributed to a larger national history; as Mandell Creighton argued, the nation's character was in part reducible to the extraordinary qualities of English men. For Creighton, the Englishman 'exists as a recognizable type of character, with special aptitudes and capacities'.[36]

Disraeli's notion of the 'chosen one' of history must be situated within this intellectual context. He worked within this cultural framework, imagining a religiously-inspired prophet or Messiah figure, often using the idiom of the Romantic genius, who would recover the nation to righteousness. *Contarini Fleming*, *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred* each share a narrative and thematic structure with *Alroy*, even though they been categorically separated, in most studies, from Disraeli's religious fantasies of the 1830s. Robert Blake claimed that '*Tancred* is the vehicle for Disraeli's own highly idiosyncratic views on race and religion', which 'really have little connexion with the ideas in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*'.[37] Yet they are all stories of chosenness and temptation, in which the central crisis is the gift and burden of God-granted leadership. Each protagonist begins the novel with the awareness that they are chosen and a plea for religious righteousness in order to fulfil their duties to their nations. The English nation suffers from political and spiritual malaise that only the saviour-figure can ameliorate through a campaign for restored religious and 'political faith'. Like biblical heroes, Disraeli's protagonists face temptations in the form of alien faiths and philosophies, often based on schools of thought that Disraeli identified as dangerous for Britain: Benthamite utilitarianism or the scientific materialism. They learn – through a series of religiously pure characters or spiritual guides (usually Jewish) and experiences (usually in the Holy Land) – that a living faith with God, maintained through a traditional religious institution is needed to temper their individual power, lest they begin to sway towards the 'vain philosophies'. As Contarini expresses, human knowledge is limited: 'Our memories are filled with ideas that have no origin in truth. We learn nothing from ourselves'.[38] Disraeli's use of the nineteenth-century

[36] Mandell Creighton, *The English National Character* (London, 1896), pp. 7-8.
[37] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 194.
[38] Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming*, pp. 349, 363, 2.

'great man' paradigm encapsulated this his doctrine of theocratic equality, based on the theocracy of Judaism. The 'chosen genius', or the righteous monarch in Disraeli's Young England vision, distinguishes himself by his religious obedience – his 'divine government' – and spiritual charisma, not by espousing popular or self-created philosophies.

When Disraeli published *Contarini Fleming* in 1832, the year before *Alroy*, critics expressed scepticism about the high poetic tone of the novel. In particular, a critic in *The Monthly Review* wrote, 'What are we to understand by exemption from "sectarian prejudices"? The absence of religion. What is meant by the "flowing spirit of creation"? Simply that there is no God'.[39] Disraeli wrote to his sister Sarah, bemused: 'I suppose you have read the Review in the Monthly [-] where I am accused of Atheism, because I retire into Solitude to write novels'.[40] The review must have seemed particularly preposterous to Disraeli considering the extent to which he had crafted Contarini as a religiously-inspired character. Later critics similarly overlooked the religious themes in *Contarini Fleming*. Blake insisted that Contarini's 'impulsiveness, his recklessness, his emotional fluctuation between euphoria and depression' were all modelled on Disraeli himself, and also were 'features to be found in the artist's temperament in all epochs, but it was particularly fashionable to display them just then'.[41] Daniel Schwarz, argues for example that Contarini's 'life mirrors [Disraeli's] own life' . . . Contarini feels that he is an outsider and a temperamental stranger'. [42]

A close reading of the novel, however, demonstrates that Disraeli emulated the religious narrative structure of *Alroy* in crafting it, and that he intended it to make a particular point about the necessity of religious obedience over self-guidance. Indeed, Schwarz's point that we must regard the hero as a mirror image of Disraeli, because Contarini is described as strange and 'other' – as a child, he is 'without country, without kindred, and without friends . . . Where I moved I looked around me, and beheld a different race to myself'

[39] *The Monthly Review* (June 1832), pp. 281-99; 283.
[40] *BDL*, i, p. 284, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 1 June 1832.
[41] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 50.
[42] Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction*, p. 33.

– comes undone when we consider the quality of Contarini's otherness.[43] The narrator distinguishes Contarini as one who is possessed of special abilities; as a 'chosen one'. Just as the Jews in *Alroy* 'must exist alone', which is 'the great and holy essence of our law', so must Contarini be different from his contemporaries in order to maintain his spiritual purity. He 'had an instinct that I was different from my fellow-creatures'.[44] And similar to Alroy and Iskander, who are figurations of the young and timid biblical David, Contarini's spiritual otherness is initially seen as an impediment: 'I was impressed with a keen conviction of inferiority. It had sometimes, indeed, crossed my mind that I was of a different order from those around me, but never that the difference was in my favour'. But when Contarini comes into maturity and moves to College, he becomes aware of his spiritual power: 'On a sudden I seemed endowed with new powers, and blessed with the gift of tongues'.[45]

Disraeli demonstrated the religious specialness of his heroes by giving them each religious proclamations at the beginning of the novel. Knowing that he has been chosen for great things, and meditating on the fate of human kingdoms, Contarini,

> lifted up my hands to the blue aether, and I said, 'Is there no hope! What is knowledge, and what is truth? How shall I gain wisdom?' The wind arose, the bosom of the desert heaved . . . I knelt down and hid my face in the moveable and burning soil, and as the wind of the desert passed over me, methought it whispered, 'Child of Nature, learn to unlearn!'

Disraeli also opened the novel *Coningsby* twelve years later with the declaration of the protagonist's chosenness. As he leaves Eton to enter adulthood and pursue his political and spiritual education, the narrator considers Coningsby's exceptionality in explicitly religious language:

> He will become more wise, will he remain as generous? His ambition may be as great; will it be as noble? . . . What, indeed, is to be the future of this existence that is now to be sent forth into the great aggregate of entities? Is it an ordinary organisation that will jostle among the crowd, be jostled? . . . Or is it a primordial and creative mind; one that will say to his fellows, 'Behold, God has given me thought; I have discovered truth, and you shall believe'?[46]

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[43] Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming*, pp. 3, 5.
[44] *Idem*., *Alroy*, p. 156.
[45] Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming*, p. 92.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 96.

In this imagined declaration to his peers, Coningsby uses the language of biblical prophecy. He even echoes Jesus, who 'said to those Jews which believed in him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free' (John 8:31-32). Through such biblical language, political leadership is presented as akin to religious election: as Jesus was sent by God to lead the Jews, so Disraeli imagines Coningsby as especially chosen to guide his nation.[47]

Like Contarini, Coningsby is endowed with special spiritual gifts. Despite his lonely childhood as an estranged orphan, Coningsby is a gifted child and 'had obtained over his intimates the ascendant power, which is the destiny of genius'. He is distinguished as a 'great man' rather than a 'commentator' early in the story. He had,

> a manner that was spontaneous; nature's pure gift, the reflex of his feeling. No artifice prompted that profound and polished homage. Not one of those influences, the aggregate of whose sway produces, as they tell us, the finished gentleman, had ever exercised its beneficent power on our orphan, and not rarely forlorn, Coningsby.[48]

Through the Jewish sage Sidonia, Disraeli communicated the connection between religious virtue and heroism. Coningsby asks Sidonia, '"Tell me . . . what is he? This Prince of whom one hears in all countries at all hours; on whose existence we are told the tranquillity, almost the civilisation, of Europe depends . . . tell me, you who can tell me, tell me what he is"'. Coningsby imagines a leader with almost supernatural qualities. In turn, Sidonia responds by describing the power of the individual genius in religious terms. When Coningsby asks, '"But what is an individual . . . against a vast public opinion?"' Sidonia replies, '"Divine . . . God made man in His own image; but the Public is made by Newspapers, Members of Parliament, Excise Officers, Poor Law Guardians"'[49] The 'Public' here is synonymous with Disraeli's notion of 'Commentators' in *Contarini Fleming*, which epitomized the antithesis of

[47] See also Hebrews 2:13: 'And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me'; and Daniel 10:21: 'But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince'.
[48] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 112.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 104.

chosen men: lacking principles of their own, they became entrenched in superficial intrigue and self-seeking pursuits. Indeed, Disraeli distinguished Contarini's greatness from the mediocrity among his contemporaries and teachers: 'They spoke sometimes of great men, I suppose for our emulation; but their great men were always commentators'. [50]

Carlyle had expressed a similar distinction in *Past and Present* (1843), claiming that nations used to be led by 'Prophets [and] Priests', but now they are guided by 'Journalists, Political Economists, Politicians, [and] Pamphleteers'.[51] In *Tancred* Disraeli showed the same disdain for busybody men of the world who lack religious insight or virtue. The narrator, mocking the tone of Tancred's parents who disapprove of his mission to the Holy Sepulchre, claims at the beginning of the novel,

> Why should Tancred go to Jerusalem? What does it signify to him whether there be religious truth or political justice? He has youth, beauty, rank, wealth, power, and all in excess. He has a mind that can comprehend their importance and appreciate their advantages. What more does he require? Unreasonable boy![52]

By contrast, the chosen and gifted Tancred wants to 'restore and renovate our communications with the Most High', and pre-empts the doctrine of theocratic equality which he will receive from the angel on Mount Sinai when he declares at the beginning of the novel, '"For my part, I prefer divine to self-government, and I wish to know how it is to be attained"'.[53] Tancred's mantra is that 'the world was never conquered by intrigue; it was conquered by faith'.[54]

Indeed, it is faith and religious vision that transform each chosen hero into a prophet-figure, rather than any overt political or parliamentary action. Tancred never realizes a political career, and Coningsby and Egremont do not begin their political leadership until the end of *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, respectively. This prerequisite of religious steadfastness for the figure of the chosen genius is best illustrated in *Contarini Fleming*. Contarini's coming of age sequence is composed of a series of mystical visions and 'visitations' that send him into

[50] *Idem.*, *Contarini Fleming*, p. 116.
[51] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* ed. Richard D. Altick (New York, 1977), p. 32.
[52] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 105.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 74.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 55.

alternatively powerful and moribund moods. He views his youth as a great struggle between his 'prophetic mind' and 'all the thousand fetters that had been forged so cunningly to bind it in its cell'.[55] These supernatural visions culminate in his symbolic crowning as a poet: 'Everything was chaos; but soon, as it were, a mystic music came rising out of the incongruous mass; a mighty secret was revealed to me, all was harmony, and order, and repose, and beauty. . . "Am I then . . . Am I then, after all, a poet"'?[56] Poetry takes him into mystical and transcendental experiences in which he receives religious revelation: 'I arose, and lifted up my arm to heaven, and waved it like a banner, and I swore by the Nature that I adored, that, in spite of all opposition, I would be an author'.[57] Contarini's poetic ability forms a strong connection to his religious power. Determined to write his *magnum opus* in a writing competition at university, for example, he seeks inspiration in a chapel: 'I wrote the first sentence while in chapel, and under the influence of music. It sounded like the organ that inspired it'.[58]

Like Alroy, and in keeping with the biblical narrative of kingship, after Contarini comes into his spiritual and poetic gifts, he is tried and tested: his spiritual fitness is threatened as he faces graver moral dilemmas. He is prone to visions and depressive episodes, in which 'the dark spirit . . . haunted me'.[59] The dark spirits take the form of the worldly, the pragmatic, and the sinful, versus the visionary, the spiritual, and the poetic. Contarini gradually moves away from the role of the transcendent poet, towards institutional religion. In his spiritual distress, he seeks religious guidance female guardian angels, saints, or blatant Christ figures. His female spiritual guides appear to him in visions and reveries. He visits a beautiful figure each day, for example; he calls her his 'mystic mistress' and names her 'Egeria', after the fourth century nun who famously made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.[60] This further establishes Contarini's identity as a religiously-inspired figure.

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[55] Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming*, p. 183.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 199
[58] *Ibid*., p. 163.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 20.
[60] *Ibid*., pp. 18-20.

Similar to Alroy's anointing as the 'chosen one' by Jabaster, Contarini comes to his spiritual apex during a dramatic conversion to Catholicism in which he enters a chapel and is 'revealed a God'.[61] During his conversion, the 'mystic mistress' is replaced by the image of 'a Magdalen kneeling and weeping in a garden . . . her large blue eyes, full of ecstatic melancholy, pierced to heaven'.[62] Contarini's conversion symbolizes the maturity of his spiritual life: 'Each year my mistress seemed to grow more spiritual, first reality, then fancy, now pure spirit: a beautiful woman, a mystical nymph, a canonised soul'.[63] Like Alroy and the biblical kings, Contarini is successful when he is faithful to his religious calling and when he adheres to the advice of his patron saints and angels; he is strongest when his endowed visionary powers are tempered by the Roman Catholic tradition. Disraeli emphasized that the great man could only prosper when faithful to his covenant-like agreement with Providence. Under the protection of Mary Magdalen, Contarini embarks on a life of 'devout meditation and solitary prayer'.[64] He believed that 'the holy Magdalen has condescended to take me under her especial protection'.[65] Within his new Catholic identity, Contarini searches for 'great men' of history upon which he can base his own aspirations. The image of Jesus Christ becomes the ultimate 'great man' of history and leader for Contarini. He 'pined for the land where the true religion flourished in becoming glory . . . the land which the Vicar of God and the Ruler of Kings honoured and sanctified by his everlasting presence'.[66]

When scholars such as David Schwarz claim that *Contarini Fleming* comprises 'the middle-class desire for revelations of aristocratic life, for romances about bizarre characters in strange lands, and for extreme behaviour on the part of wilful egotists posing as latter-day Byrons', they miss Disraeli's construction of Contarini's mission as a religious one.[67] Contarini's Catholicism becomes the religious symbol of his exceptional status: with a prayer

[61] *Ibid*., p. 52.
[62] *Ibid*., pp. 46-47.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 48.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 52.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 56.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 73.
[67] Daniel R. Schwarz, '"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin": Jewish Perspectives in Disraeli's Fiction', *Jewish History* 10:2 (1996), p. 39.

to Mary Magdalen that she might 'smile upon thy elected and favourite child' he immediately resolves to travel to Venice; before setting off, he 'kissed a cross three times'.[68] Emulating biblical pattern of *Alroy*, Contarini falls into trial and vice on his journey. The moment that he comes into his power is also the moment he becomes dangerously conceited and sinful: 'Self-satisfaction sparkled on my countenance'.[69] Contarini's two primary temptations in the novel correspond to the main threats to the chosen leader in Disraeli's thought. This provides evidence of the salience, and immediacy, of the biblical trope of temptation to Disraeli, and suggests that it informed the manner in which he thought about political and social dangers. Disraeli's political aversion to rationalism, cosmopolitanism, and atheism constitute Contarini's first temptation: he comes under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophy that he learns at university. Turning his back on classical and religious learning – the 'Dorians' and 'Hebrews' – he becomes a zealous convert to a revolutionary Voltairean creed: 'Let us fly from the feudal system. Nobles and wealthy, let us cast our titles to the winds, and our dross to the earth which produced it. Let us pride ourselves only on the gifts of nature, and exist only to her beneficence'.[70] As we shall see, the hollowness of a humanist, hedonistic creed – as opposed to Judeo-Christian belief – was a theme that Disraeli would repeat in nearly all of his subsequent novels. Contarini's descent into hedonism echoes Alroy's similar downfall and also anticipates Disraeli's critique of the epicurean Mr Phoebus in *Lothair*.

Contarini's pleasure-seeking attitude and arrogant self-governance lead to his fall from power. Disraeli represents this as a kind of ideological treachery. For Alroy, it took the form of becoming the leader of a foreign army when he married the Muslim Princess Schirene. Similarly, Contarini begins mingling with his philosophical enemies and becomes the leader of a revolutionary faction who make 'a sacred vow to stand or fall by each other in this great

[68] Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming*, p. 57.
[69] *Ibid*., p. 120.
[70] *Ibid*., p. 57.

struggle for freedom and for nature'.[71] Like Alroy, Contarini is voted the captain of his band of men. They 'looked only to my command'.[72]

Under his new amoral system, Contarini becomes a thief and a liar. He turns his back on his patron saint, Mary Magdalen, and falls into blatant sinfulness. As Alroy, who descends into military savagery, which causes his rift with the noble Jabaster, so Contarini and his Revolutionary Society were 'like young tigers, who, for a moment tamed, had now for the first time tasted blood, and rushed back to their own nature . . . The Secret Union for the Amelioration of Society suddenly turned into a corps of bandits'.[73] Through the narrative of the great man who has fallen from righteousness, Disraeli illustrates the outcome of a rejection of traditional learning and religion: politically, philosophically and spiritually, Contarini becomes destitute and unrepentant. When the Revolutionary Society is pursued by the police, the extent of Contarini's conceit shows itself: he 'was not sorry. I felt the inextricable difficulties in which we were involved, and what annoyed me most was, that I had hitherto seen no mode of closing my part with dignity'.[74] Contarini comes to a similar moment of reckoning as the protagonist of *The Young Duke* (1829), who, estranged from Roman Catholicism, realizes the baseness of his selfish outlook.

> 'Ay! There it is, I feel it now. Too well I feel that happiness must spring from purer fountains than self-love. We are not born merely for ourselves, and they who, full of pride, make the trial, as I have done, and think that the world is made for them, and not for mankind, must come to as bitter results, perhaps as bitter as fate; for, by Heavens! I am half tempted at this moment to fling myself from this cliff, and so end all'.[75]

Both the young duke and Contarini are tempted by characters who are foils to the Christ-figure. Disraeli illustrated his deeply drawn contrast between 'men of the world' and 'chosen men' in Contarini's dangerous experimentation with his father, Baron Fleming's, self-serving doctrine, under the influence of which he loses his exceptional poetic gifts. He 'imbibed [his

[71] *Ibid*., p. 60.
[72] *Ibid*., pp. 121-125.
[73] *Ibid*., p. 128.
[74] *Ibid*., p. 129.
[75] Disraeli, *The Young Duke*, p. 245.

father's] deep worldliness' and 'recognised self-interest as the spring of all action'.[76] Disraeli described Baron Fleming's form of greatness – 'the lives of what my father considered really great men' – as utilitarian and Machiavellian. It is composed of,

> men of great energies and violent volition, who look upon their fellow-creatures as mere tools, with which they can build up a pedestal for their solitary statue, and who sacrifice every feeling which should sway humanity, and every high work which genius should really achieve.[77]

Baron Fleming is nearly the same character as Coningsby's guardian, Lord Monmouth: they each use 'their fellow-creatures as mere tools'.[78] Similarly, Lord Marney, Egrement's older brother in *Sybil*, abuses his role as landowner by neglecting his duty to his agricultural workers, which leads to his own death. Baron Fleming, Lord Monmouth, and Lord Marney each violate the social contracts of a Disraelian society, which are based on faith in an almost providentially ordained social order; and therefore, a relationship between the classes that is based in religious morality. The division between the 'two nations' in *Sybil* is an outcome of the breach in this delicate social fabric by selfish men who prize personal and economic gain over the maintenance of social and religious unity.

By contrast, when Contarini re-aligns himself with his religious mentors and saints, and applies his spiritual approach to the practice of politics, he shows outstanding ability. The same religious language of Contarini's rise to leadership appeared in *Alroy*; as he contemplates his political future while looking out the window, 'The deer were stealing home to their bowers, and I watched them till their glancing forms gradually lost their lustre in the declining twilight. The glory had now departed, and all grew dim'.[79] As we have seen, 'the glory had now departed from Israel' derives from 1 Samuel 4:21, in which the ark of Israel is captured by the Philistines: 'And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of

[76] *Idem*., *Contarini Fleming*, p. 111.
[77] *Ibid*., p. 154.
[78] *Ibid*., p. 155.
[79] *Ibid*., p. 173.

God is taken'.[80] This suggests that through the novel, Disraeli expressed the need for English leaders, like biblical leaders, to align themselves with the teachings of Scripture.

In addition to this biblical message, Disraeli portrayed the same *active* faith that he did in *Tancred*: Contarini's return to righteousness occurs in the Holy Land. His journey to Israel begins as soon as rediscovers his Catholicism and his connection to Mary Magdalen: he has a vision in which he is in a great storm; 'I knelt down and prayed, and suddenly the window was irradiated, and the bright form of a female appeared . . . In her hand she held a crucifix . . . And she smiled and said, *Sunshine succeeds storm. You have been long expected*'. Contarini's return to faith is symbolized by his experience in a chapel in Venice:

> A large crucifix of ebony was placed upon the altar, and partly concealed a picture placed over the Holy Table … Oh! … it was the original of that famous Magdalen which had, so many years before, in a different place, produced so great a revolution in my feelings … I quitted the chapel, revolving in my mind this strange coincidence, and crossing the lawn, I came to a temple … I raised my sight and read, *Enter, you have been long expected*.[81]

Contarini reclaims his identity as a chosen, 'expected' one after his fall into the sin of Enlightenment philosophy, hedonism, and pragmatism. The apex of his spiritual maturity occurs when he combines the religious, philosophical, and practical lessons he has learned from his trials and achieves a rational, broad Christian faith: this occurs in the hallowedness of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. As Alroy navigated the varying rewards and impediments within religious orthodoxy, so Contarini moves away from the feverish doctrine which possessed him in his revolutionary humanism.

Thus the notion of the 'Messiah' as 'the real saviour of the prophecy!' remained an abstract idea for Disraeli, however it joined with his vision of a united Judeo-Christian theocracy to constitute a religious ideology that he explored in his fiction throughout his life. As Timothy Larsen has claimed, there is a tendency to assume, in nineteenth-century historical and especially literary studies, 'that art filled the vacuum left by the absence of

[80] 1 Samuel 4:21-22.
[81] Disraeli, *Contarini Fleming*, p. 363.

religion'.[82] But as Larsen and others have shown, and as this section has demonstrated, nineteenth-century religious ideas were imagined and mediated through art. The next section considers the idea that Disraeli even engaged in forms of religious *practice* through his fiction.

[82] Timothy Larsen, *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 2006), p. 4.

III.

Religious practice: Disraeli and the parish

In *Benjamin Disraeli: An Unconventional Biography* (1903), the journalist Wilfrid Meynell (1852-1948) recalled a particular eulogy that had taken place after Disraeli's death:

> Disraeli was not always a mere onlooker at the rites and ceremonies of his parish church. When he died, the vicar, the Rev. H. Blagden, paid him public tribute for his private pieties: 'Have we not here watched him, even when at the height of his prosperity and power, coming down, simply and humbly, Sunday after Sunday, to take his place among us and worship God? Do we not remember how we knelt side by side with him, only on Christmas Day last at your altar, where he received from my hands the Blessed Body and Blood of Christ?' [83]

It is important to imagine Disraeli within the services of worship that he attended regularly. His weekly life would have been framed by religious ritual; the rhythms and language of worship and liturgy would have absorbed no small part of his time. Indeed, Stanley Weintraub opened his biography in 1993 with a description, in great detail, of Disraeli's circumcision in a customary religious ceremony (*brit milah*), with the *kiseh Eliyahu* – the symbolic chair of Elijah, from 1 Kings 19:10-14 – and a gathering of at least ten Jewish men (*minyan*) to witness the act, and thereby strengthen the witness of Israel's covenant with God. [84] Weintraub intended to remind readers of the highly particular religious environment into which Disraeli was born, especially after Robert Blake made so little reference to it in his biography of 1966. At stages of his childhood that he would be able to remember, Disraeli received elementary Jewish and Hebrew education and preparation. He was originally educated at 'Miss Roper's' in Islington before moving to a boarding school in Blackheath, run by Rev. John Potticary, from the age of nine or ten.[85] Weintraub recounts that at Potticary's, 'during prayers, Ben and another Jewish pupil, Moses Saqui, "stood back" – a conspicuous exercise in self-alienation.

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[83] Wilfrid Meynell, *Benjamin Disraeli: An Unconventional Biography* (2 vols., London, 1903), i, p. 149. See Viola Meynell, *Francis Thompson and Wilfrid Meynell: A Memoir* (London, 1952). See also June Badeni, 'Meynell , Alice Christiana Gertrude (1847–1922)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/35008].

[84] See Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli* (London, 1993), especially pp. xi- xiv, pp. 17-33 for the meaning of Disraeli's name in Hebrew and the Jewish rituals performed at Disraeli's birth. See also Paul Smith, *Disraeli: A Brief Life* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 10-12.

[85] For more on Disraeli's education, see Blake, *Disraeli*, pp. 10-18.

The two boys had weekly lessons in Hebrew, on Saturday, when school met only half a day, from a visiting teacher, probably to prepare them for bar mitzvah at thirteen'.[86] Both Blake and Weintraub imply that after Disraeli's baptism, it would have been 'embarrassing' to return to his school in Blackheath; thus he moved to a new school in Higham Hall in Epping Forest under the Unitarian headmaster the Revd Eli Cogan, where he was educated in classical languages and texts. Cogan's name – the Anglicized version of the Jewish name Kogan – suggests that Isaac may have chosen him as another Jewish-Christian convert.[87] Thus Disraeli came of age in an environment where of Judeo-Christian religious education and religious practice.

The manner in which Disraeli practised religion, and encouraged the widespread practice of religion, must also be considered in light of his self-conscious role as a benevolent landowner and gentleman, the indissoluble relationship he perceived between faith and duty, and the way that religious rhythms and practices constituted the fabric of the worlds that Disraeli created in his fiction. Tancred asks 'if there be no faith, how can there be duty?'[88] Disraeli shared with Caryle a broad definition of religion not as a monolithic, heterodox doctrine, but as the overall principles that govern individuals. This led both Disraeli and Carlyle to a faith that was far more concerned with active political stewardship, and with building a society in which traditional social relationships were maintained by a common religious vision, than with a faith built on personal testimony, evangelism, or particular sectarian allegiance. This remained consistent with Disraeli's view of Tory politics. As Jonathan Parry has shown, Disraeli 'talked of the tories as the national and popular party, but this was in contrast to whig exclusiveness and factionalism'.[89]

The rituals and demands of parochial church life constituted an important part of Disraeli's vision of himself as a benevolent landowner and religious gentleman. He sought to

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[86] Weintraub, *Disraeli*, pp. 28-32. See, as Weintraub suggests, *Jewish Ritual; or The Religious Customs and Ceremonies of the Jews used in their Publick Worship and Private Devotions* (London, 1753).
[87] Neither Weintraub nor Blake made any mention of Cogan's name as originally Jewish.
[88] Disraeli, *Tancred*, 49.
[89] Jonathan Parry, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 2007), p. 63.

practice the vision of the ideal feudal estate that he constructed in the Young England novels. A plaque can still be found in the pew within the choir of Hughenden Church which reads, 'Seat Occupied by The Right Hon. The Earl of Beaconsfield K.G.'. His correspondence is rife with references to attending church, and he also kept close relationships with the clergy first at his family's home at Bradenham and then in his own estate at Hughenden. In 1848, for example, he wrote to his sister that he had 'made up my mind to send a copy' of a new edition of Isaac D'Israeli's *Curiosities of Literature* to 'Mrs Partridge as well as Is[aac] King'.[90] Mrs Partridge was the wife of the Revd William Edwards Partridge (1809-86), vicar of Ilmer, Buckinghamshire, and Disraeli's correspondent and friend throughout his adulthood, while Rev. Isaac King was the rector of the D'Israeli home in Bradenham. During the 1840s Disraeli mentioned the Kings often in his correspondence with his sister, asking her to 'Remember me very kindly to the Kings'.[91] In 1848 Disraeli wrote to Lord Stanley (future earl of Derby) comparing his case of gout with Isaac King's: 'I have just seen a case, in the person of the Rector of my own parish, a man about your Lordship's time of life & still a greater sufferer'.[92]

When it came time to appoint his own vicar in Hughenden, Disraeli wrote to Samuel Wilberforce, bishop of Oxford, proposing, 'subject to your approbation, to prefer to the Vicarage of Hughenden, the Revd. Charles Wishart Clubbe, of St. John's Coll: Cam. He is, at present, Curate of Palgrave, near my friend, Sir Ed: Kerrison . . . & in that capacity has had several years experience of the parochial duties of our rural world, tho' quite in the prime of life'.[93] Rev. Clubbe was duly instated as vicar of Hughenden, and with the Clubbes, Disraeli continued to perform his role as gracious landowner. In January 1862, Emily Clubbe, Revd Clubbe's wife, wrote to Disraeli to ask for funds 'to try & get our singing better which we find is impossible with a Barrel Organ . . . We think of trying to get one of £20 or £25 as a small one would not be heard in our Church'.[94] Disraeli replied favourably, asking for a 'subscription

[90] *BDL*, v, p. 117, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 20 Dec. 1848.
[91] *BDL*, iv, p. 198, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 10 Nov. 1845.
[92] *BDL*, v, p. 119, Disraeli to Lord Stanley, 26 Dec. 1848.
[93] *BDL*, v, p. 447, Disraeli to Samuel Wilberforce, 15 Jun. 1851.
[94] *BDL*, viii, p. 173, Emily Clubbe to Disraeli, Jan. 1862.

list' and assuring her that he would give it 'my best consideration'. He closed his letter, 'We have been wandering about in extreme parts of the Kingdom . . . Mrs Disraeli unites with me, in every kind wish to yourself, & to Mr Clubbe'.[95]

These connections to parish life testify to the centrality of church, and worship, even to Disraeli's mundane day-to-day life. While this was to be expected of a Victorian gentleman and MP and thus cannot itself point to any particular religious investment in Disraeli, it is nevertheless important to remember the pervasiveness of church and clergy in his own experience, and also in his vision for England. Disraeli celebrated his novels most when he felt they spoke to the clergy. The Rev. James Rudge, rector of Hawkchurch, Devon, wrote to Disraeli claiming, 'the singular delight' he had experienced in reading *Coningsby*; the return to religious steadfastness 'suggested in your admirable work', claimed Rudge, provided the only chance of saving the nation.[96] Disraeli responded to Rudge, 'It is [in] the appreciation of minds like yours, that a public man finds his highest reward'.[97] The Young England novels were intended to speak to the vital relationship, and the 'territorial' contract between the polity and the clergy; Disraeli thus considered Rudge's expression of a common vision a success.

In his depictions of this religious practice, Disraeli drew on his notion of himself as a country landowner and church-goer. His desire to '*act* what I *write*' took especial shape in this manner; many of the settings in the Young England novels were based on visions of churches and estates that he saw in his own travels.[98] On 10 August 1846, he wrote to his sister Sarah, describing Beaumanoir, his model for Coningsby Castle.

> I thought you wd. like to have a line from Beaumanoir, tho' it is not in the least like Beaumanoir, but Coningsby Castle to the very life; gorgeous, gothic, of a 1/4 century past, & slopes & shrubberies like Windsor . . . Yesterday, after the private chapel, we lionized the Castle.[99]

[95] *BDL*, viii, p. 173, Emily Clubbe to Disraeli, Jan. 1862.
[96] Hughenden MSS, H/E/VI/0/81.
[97] *BDL*, iv, p. 152, Disraeli to Revd James Rudge, 24 Dec. 1844.
[98] Qtd in Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse*, p. 1.
[99] *BDL* iv. 247, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 10 Aug. 1846.

Similarly, in creating the idyllic Marney Abbey in *Sybil* Disraeli drew on a visit to Bingley with his wife and Lord John Manners in October of 1844.

> Do you remember your mounting the Druids altar? Mrs. Di. was frightened at your audacity. I think it gave me the idea of Walter Gerards rostrum. The Abbey was drawn from 'Fountains', & is as faithfully delineated as musing observation & memory cd. enable me. It is a much vaster & grander ruin than Bolton, tho' in a site far less picturesque. I took my idea of Mowbray Church from Ripon wh: was at hand.[100]

Disraeli wrote much of *Tancred* during an extended stay in France with Mary Anne in which he secluded himself from political news in order to experience the fullness of a pastoral life. He wrote home to Sarah to describe his daily walks during the vesper bells, and asked for some materials on Syria, presumably sources he needed for *Tancred*, to be sent to him.

> Our promenades are in general very extensive, for the place abounds in paths & at every turn the landscape assumes a new character, always rural and charming. 'Tis an entirely rural country, not pastoral for there are no sheep or shepherds, but infinite meadows, red cows & milkmaids . . . The names of the Duke of Wn. & Sir Robert Peel & all those sort of people are quite unknown here . . . As we walk out in the late afternoon, about 5 o'ck:, vespers, we sometimes hear the bells of half a dozen surrounding villages sounding at the same time – there are oratories & little chapels certainly every half mile, & a sacred image on a tree almost in every field. . . Ask Ralph to be so kind as to call at G.G. & see if in M[ary Anne]'s boudoir, my room of late, he can find two thin 'blue books' . . . 'Correspondence on the affairs of Syria' or something of that sort.[101]

These letters illuminate the dialogue between Disraeli's own experience in the world and the worlds he created in his novels. He self-consciously practised the existence he advocated in the books, cultivating a connection between pastoral landscapes and religious unity. He wrote verses describing this very connection to Mary Anne while they were in France in 1845: 'Happy, fertile Land! / Tranquil & green; a sea of sylvan fields / And rural spires, whose hallowed voices float / Around our evening walks, as Vesper calls / The peasant to his shrine'.[102] He saw himself as a Coningsby or an Egrement, and he saw England as possessing the potential for a real return to a religious bodypolitick. Religious practice entailed not merely

[100] *BDL*, pp. 167-8, Disraeli to Lord John Manners, 12 May 1845.
[101] *BDL*, pp. 196-7, Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 26 Oct. 1845.
[102] *Ibid*. p. 198.

participating in church ritual, but acting out the political and religious vision he espoused for the country.

These parochial relationships translated into the vignettes Disraeli painted in his fiction of a practical, applied religious practice that manifested itself in action and the fulfilment of duty. This can be compared with Carlyle's contemporaneous vision of religious harmony. In *Past and Present* (1843), for example, Carlyle commended the quiet and dutiful religious life of the monks of Bury St Edmunds. Their modest faith provided a powerful antidote to the falseness, selfishness, and complacency of the utilitarian minds he repudiated, or even aspects of Methodism, which were sectarian and damaging to the Church:

> Jocelin, Eadmer, and such religious men, have as yet nothing of 'Methodism;' no Doubt or even root of Doubt. Religion is not a diseased self-introspection, an agonising inquiry: their duties are clear to them, the way of supreme good plain, indisputable, and they are travelling on it. Religion lies over them like an all-embracing heavenly canopy, like an atmosphere and life-element, which is not spoken of, which in all things is presupposed without speech?[103]

Elizabeth Gaskell expressed a similar principle in *Mary Barton* (1838), in which she claimed that 'the surest conversion to our faith, whatever it may be' was 'when it is beheld as the actuating principle, from which we never swerve . . . instead of over-much profession, it is worked into the life, and moves every action!'[104] Disraeli portrayed religious faith in this same way in his novels: as the invisible governing force of the individual's productive life. The social ailments facing Victorian Britain could be explained by a loss of faith, which in turn led to the breakdown of the practical contracts that existed between the individuals and the Church. As Tancred puts it, 'if there be no faith, how can there be duty?'[105] The question, 'Is there such a thing as religious truth?' is directly followed by, 'Is there such a thing as political right? Is there such a thing as social propriety?' [106] For Disraeli, political practice remained inseparable

[103] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 65-6.
[104] Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton* (London, 1994), p. 258. For the connection between Gaskell's and Disraeli's work, see John Parham, '"For You, Pollution". The Victorian Novel and Human Ecology: Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*', *Green Letters* Vol. 14 (2011), pp. 23-38.
[105] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 49.
[106] *Idem*., *Coningsby* p. 109.

from religious practice: constitutional relationships existed on the basis of the nation as a landed and religious entity.

Thus the Young England heroes – Coningsby, Egrement, and Tancred – each undertake lessons in this broad Disraelian religious practice which is unlimited by a particular ecclesiastical sect, and inextricably connected to political duty. A shared notion of religious and political responsibility unites characters from different class and religious backgrounds. Coningsby is influenced in his political development by 'three individuals whose acquaintance had greatly influenced his mind; Eustace Lyle, the elder Millbank, above all, Sidonia.' Lyle, Millbank, and Sidonia each profess different faiths: Millbank, a strident member of the new manufacturing middle class, is presumably an Anglican, or perhaps a Methodist. Lyle is a Roman Catholic, and Sidonia is a Jew. Even with these different religious commitments, the three characters share a perspective on the destructive qualities of the nation: they 'were in their hearts disaffected with the political constitution of the country.'[107] They each bestow the same message on Coningsby: the social and political evils of England, they explain, do not arise from social or political agitation. They come from religious indifference: a failure of the religious imagination to incite the people into responsible political practice.

Disraeli based the character of Eustace Lyle on the Roman Catholic convert Ambrose Phillipps (1809-78), who promoted a return to the holiness of the Middle Ages, and changed his name to 'Lisle' to accentuate his descent from a medieval knight. Lisle, a friend and colleague of the Gothic architect Pugin, came into contact with Young England: he shared their yearning for the feudal simplicity of the past.[108] Disraeli's invention, Eustace Lyle, embodied the archetypical feudal and religious landlord. The narrator describes Lyle's estate as a kind of sacred building; it is 'white and glittering' and 'sparkled with its pinnacles in the sunshine as it rose in strong relief against its verdant background.' It is Gothic – built 'in the

[107] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[108] Margaret Pawley, 'Lisle, Ambrose Lisle March Phillipps de (1809–1878)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/7457].

finest style of Christian architecture' – and situated within 'a vast and enclosed table-land, abounding in all the qualities of the ancient chase: turf and trees, a wilderness of underwood, and a vast spread of gorse and fern.[109] Such conspicuously feudal imagery – the Gothic church, the medieval demesne, the 'ancient chase' – demonstrates that Disraeli returned to a specific moment in Britain's socio-political past in which religious practice took a totalizing form.

In his depictions of the bliss of medieval Catholicism Disraeli drew little distinction between the tenets of the Anglicanism he championed and the particularities of Roman Catholic theology. He was uninterested in the theological differences that had been amplified during the Reformation. What interested him, and what he hoped to resurrect in his own time, was the unifying nature of the Roman Catholic Church: it touched every strata of society and brought the classes together into a cohesive social system. This cohesion was accomplished through political and religious practice. Thus Coningsby is interested in the repercussions of Lyle's faith on his political character. Lyle's religiosity is the source of his sense of *noblesse oblige*. He explains to Coningsby his philosophy of almsgiving: '"The people of the parishes with which I am connected come to St. Genevieve twice a-week at this hour . . . I wish the people constantly and visibly to comprehend that Property is their protector and friend."' In the entirety of his community, we are told, there was 'not a heart there that did not bless the bell that sounded from the tower of St. Genevieve!'[110]

Sidonia expounds a synonymous religious philosophy to that of Eustace Lyle. He explains to his pupil Coningsby that Britain's moral and spiritual depravity cannot be cured by government: '"You may have a corrupt government and a pure community . . . Rely upon it . . . that England should think more of the community and less of the government"'. Coningsby asks, '"Where then would you look for hope?"' and Sidonia answers,

> 'In what is more powerful than laws and institutions, and without which the best laws and the most skillful institutions may be a dead letter, or the very means of tyranny; in the national character. It is not in the increased feebleness of its institutions that I see the peril of England; it is in the decline of its character as a community'.[111]

[109] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, pp. 122-3.
[110] *Ibid.*, pp. 127-8.
[111] *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

The medieval church – recalled by Eustace Lyle's estate – had embodied the dignified and socially harmonious character of the English nation. Similarly, in *Sybil* Egremont realises that the abbots of Marney adhered to an inclusive social code that vanished at the hands of traitorous landowners who, like Alroy, Contarini, and the Young Duke, descend into self-worship and turn their backs on the religious law of the land. The abbots created an institution 'where the traveller, from the proud baron to the lonely pilgrim, asked the shelter and the succor that never were denied'.[112] The parish community comprised the most important unit of English society because it accomplished the principle that Disraeli presented in *Tancred*: theocratic equality. Only from the philosophical assumption that God had ordered civilization according to a celestial pattern could individuals adopt their place without agitation, and within the parish, vying classes could live together: 'for there, in the presence of God, all were brethren'.[113]

In the character of Aubrey St Lys, the Anglican vicar of Mowbray in *Sybil*, Disraeli illustrated the same notion of a unified religious and political practice. Lys has a doctrinally unparticular faith that has its basis in political action. He blames the divisive state of the Church for the brokenness of the English people. Before the Reformation, the Church acted as a great equalizer, offsetting the inequalities of the political economy and 'shar[ing] equally among all its prayer, its incense, and its music; [and] its sacred instructions'. Now, Lys laments, the people of England distrust those same 'forms and ceremonies' because they think of them as Roman and treacherous. But 'forms and ceremonies existed before Rome', Lys explains, and there is no single true church; instead, Christendom is 'thoroughly, sincerely catholic: adapted to all climes, and to all ages'. There is no need to 'bow to the necessity of a visible head in a defined locality'. Lys blurs the doctrinal differences between Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism to such an extent that Vernon Bogdanor mistook Lys for a Roman

[112] Benjamin Disraeli, *Sybil; Or the Two Nations*, ed. Sheila M. Smith, (Oxford, 1981), pp. 59, 57.
[113] *Ibid*. p. 111.

Catholic character in his introduction to *Lothair* in 1975.[114] This demonstrates the utter flexibility of Disraeli's church allegiances. What unified all creeds, and created a cohesive Christendom, were their manifestation in political practice.

By contrast, the vicar of Marney Abbey – the seat of the Marney family, gained through plundering land during the Reformation, and which is now lorded by Charles Egremont's corrupt older brother – represents the ills that arise from sectarian and/or apathetic clergy. The narrator presents him as ineffectual and lazy:

> The vicar of Marney, who had been presented by himself, was [Lord Marney's] model of a priest: he left everybody alone. Under the influence of Lady Marney, the worthy vicar had once warmed up to some ebullition of very low church zeal; there was some talk of an evening lecture, the schools were to be remodeled, certain tracts were actually distributed. But Lord Marney soon stopped all this. 'No priestcraft at Marney', said this gentle proprietor of abbey lands.[115]

Indeed, Disraeli mocked the irony of Lord Marney – who is 'cynical, devoid of sentiment, arrogant, literal, [and] hard' – as a 'proprietor of abbey lands'.[116] Throughout the novel the Marney family are described as the 'lay abbots of Marney' to denote their betrayal and negligence of their religious inheritance.[117]

[114] See Nils Clausson, 'English Catholics and Roman Catholicism in Disraeli's Novels' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (1979), pp. 461-2.
[115] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 46.
[116] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[117] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

IV.

Neology and Doctrine

Disraeli's conversation with Edward Stanley in 1851 closed with Disraeli's gloomy premonition that Christianity in Britain, under siege as it was by 'all the Voltairic notions' and critical schools of thought, was doomed. He expressed to Stanley his frustration that the scientific rules of empiricism led people into the trap of trying to prove, scientifically, the existence of God. This erroneous logic, he claimed, would deal a death blow to traditional Christianity. Stanley recalled

> Talk of religion – he thinks Xy cannot last 100 years. I spoke of churches & building – you will find there never were more than in the time of Lucian – it was the last struggle – we are at the age of the Antonines – 'It is impossible to prove the existence of God from any a priori reasoning – a man is a fool who attempts to decide the point one way or the other. Science and religion are necessarily opposed. I consider that science must in the end govern the world – it will be the substitute'. I argued that the world up to this day has always required some religion: always will. Answer. 'The world is in its infancy – you might as well say that a child must have sugarcandy always, because it has always been used to it! . . . 'I daresay the thing may last our time – I do what I can to keep it up'.[118]

In the following decades, Disraeli continued to think about and discuss the fate of revealed religion, showing especial interest in German biblical criticism and the 'Neology' that so dominated theological and philosophical thought in the 1850s and 1860s. In 1862, he recalled in his 'Reminiscences' a conversation with his parliamentary colleague Sir George Lewis (1806-63), the Liberal who served as Chancellor from 1855-58, and as Home Secretary from 1859-63:

> Speaking of the 'Essays and Reviews' & other works of that kind he said 'There is nothing new in all this. The whole of Neology may be found in an article in Bayle's Dictionary – the article about Eve'. I was surprised at this, being tolerably familiar with Bayle, & on returning home turned to the article Eve – but found nothing of the kind. I mentioned this to Sir George, when I had an opportunity – & he said he would look into the matter. Some days after, we were in the same division lobby, & he told me it was not the article Eve, but some other. He gave me the title, but I forgot it, & meant to have again spoken to him on the subject – when alas! He was no more.[119]

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[118] *BDL*, vi, Appendix.
[119] Helen Swartz and Marvin Swartz (eds.), *Disraeli's Reminiscences* (London, 1975), p. 102.

In his next diary entry, Disraeli considered Lewis' point about the originality of German theology. He wrote, 'The French Semitic Scholars took the lead at the end of the 17th Century & the beginning of the 18th Century. Pere Simon, Astruc, & Bochart – these produced the German movement. We must not forget Spinoza though – compare dates'.[120]

Like his reading of Scripture in the 1830s and 1840s, this dimension of Disraeli's thought in the 1860s has yet to be sufficiently considered in studies of his ideology. Disraeli's parliamentary and ecclesiastical activity in the 1860s is well-documented; but it requires emphasis that Disraeli was not a doctrinal thinker.[121] While he fostered his political alliance with Samuel Wilberforce, and executed his campaign for diocesan reform with a series of speeches in Oxford, in private he took much more of an interest in, as Lord Stanley had put it, 'the philosophical discussion of religious questions . . . the origin of the various beliefs which have governed mankind, their changes at different epochs, and those still to come'.[122] It was not in doctrinal or ecclesiastical reform that he envisioned the salvation of Christianity. For many churchmen in the period, Darwin's work and *Essays and Reviews* threatened the truth claims contained in the Church's dogma. It is clear from his reading and discussions about religion that Disraeli was much more concerned and interested in the direction of public ideology and private theology. As John Vincent put it aptly, 'Disraeli . . . was a modern in religion; he accepted that the familiar beliefs of folk Christianity would never pass muster again'.[123]

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[120] *Ibid*., p. 103. See Simon Richard, *A Critical History of the Old Testament*, trans. Richard Hampden (London, 1682). We know this is the edition Disraeli used because in *Reminiscences* he goes on to write, 'Pere Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament was translated by the son of Hampden'. Simon Richard challenged the Mosaic authorship of the entire *Pentateuch*, a critical line of questioning that had already been opened by Louis Cappel, Johannes Morinus, Abraham ben Ezra, Hobbes and Spinoza. See also Jean Astruc, *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroit que Moyse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse* (Bruxelles, 1753); and for background and analysis, John Jarick, *Sacred Conjectures: The Context and Legacy of Robert Lowth and Jean Astruc* (New York, 2007). Astruc used tools in textual criticism from his study of Classics to attempt to vindicate Mosaic authorship by saying that Moses drew on four different documents that had been compiled by a later author. See Samuel Bochart, *Hierozoicon, sive, bipertitum opus De animalibus Sacræ Scripturæ* (London, 1663). For general background see Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion, and Scholarship, 1550-1700* (Leiden, 2012).
[121] See Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966), pp. 507-15.
[122] Vincent (ed.), *Disraeli, Derby and the Conservative Party*, p. 31.
[123] *Idem*., *Disraeli*, p. 39.

His attention to biblical criticism and the way in which he wrote about it to his correspondents and in his diary suggest that Disraeli was interested in lines of argument that would bring religious thought into unison with new criticism. In the same diary entry in which he considered Simon, Astruc, and Spinoza, he jotted down his own theological reflections.

> Anthropomorphism: a great cry against it by the Philosophes. But if the Hegelian principle be true, that Man is the first organization in which God is conscious, then the old legends of Genesis, that God made Man in his own image, comes to the same thing. This is curious, & might be pursued.[124]

As John Vincent remarks, 'the singular thing is that Disraeli should even have been talking Hegelian religion in the early 1860s'.[125] Even the pious Gladstone, whose index of reading in his diaries would make a fairly comprehensive theological library, only made one reference to Hegel, and it was to J.M. Sterrett's *The Ethics of Hegel* (1893).[126] Yet Disraeli allied himself with Gladstone on his interest in religious questions. In 1863 he wrote in his diary,

> Assuming that the popular idea of Inspiration be abandoned, & the difference between sacred & profane history relinquished, what would be the position of the Hebrew race in universal History, viewed with reference to their influence on Man? I thought of advertising through a medium that would command confidence £500 – or even a £1000 for the best essay on this question; perhaps more precisely expressed. The Judges, perhaps, to be Gladstone, Canon Stanley, & myself.[127]

These entries suggest that, as Stanley claimed, Disraeli had a philosophical interest in the ideological direction of the future. On the exact form of religious obedience that the nation and the self required, Disraeli remained unparticular. Contemporary churchmen were disconcerted by this quality of un-particularity in Disraeli's religious rhetoric. The clergyman and close colleague of Gladstone's, Malcolm MacColl, after reading *Coningsby* maintained that 'Lord Beaconsfield would think himself perfectly justified in conforming to the Christian Church of England and receiving her Sacraments without pledging his conscience to a full

[124] Swartz and Swartz (eds.), *Disraeli's Reminiscences*, p. 102.
[125] See Vincent, *Disraeli*, p.41. Cf. Paul Smith, *Disraeli*, p. 87 for Disraeli's use of the Hegelian metaphor of 'the crowd'.
[126] See *GD* xiv, p. 417.
[127] Swartz and Swartz (eds.), *Disraeli's Reminiscences*, pp. 103-4.

acceptance of the dogmas of the Christian Creed'.[128] This was a quality that Froude noticed in him:

> from the nature of [Disraeli's] mind, he must have known that national religions do not rest upon argument and evidence. When forms vary from age to age and country to country no one of them can be absolutely free from error . . . Religion . . . is a thing which grows and cannot be made. The central idea that man is a responsible being is everywhere the same; but the idea shapes various forms for itself, into which legend, speculation, and prevailing opinions necessarily enter.[129]

This attitude – that the core of the religious idea mattered, but that subsequent dogma should be amended as nations and peoples evolve – caused Disraeli to adopt a conciliatory, rather than a sectarian approach to his own religious principles and his voting on ecclesiastical matters. Disraeli was influenced by Isaac D'Israeli's well-known opinion that orthodox Judaism remained trapped – by the rigidity of its own dogma – in a mass of superstitions and barbarous practices.[130] He shared with his father the idea that if religion were to survive in the modern world, doctrine could not remain fixed. It needed to show adaptability. The contemporary author William Taylor, in his obituary of Isaac D'Israeli, spoke to this quality of D'Israeli's thought.

> D'Israeli chose to be purely a speculative philosopher, who never mingled in political broils, and who shunned all connection with political and religious parties . . . At no period of his life was D'Israeli a rabbinist or Talmudist; a large and liberal philosophy raised him as it did Mendelsohn above all the exclusive, intolerant, and anti-social glosses with which the authors of the Mishna and Gemara have encumbered and distorted the Mosaic legislation. He clung to the principles of the sublime and tolerant prayer offered by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple, and if he ever sought for an example in the Talmud, he selected that of Rabbi Meir.

Taylor alluded to an anecdote within the writing of Rabbi Meir which he called, 'so illustrative of that genius of Judaism which we regard as the predominant characteristic of both the

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[128] Malcolm MacColl, 'Lord Beaconsfield', *Contemporary Review* 39 (1881), p. 1002. Qtd. in Anthony S. Wohl, '"Ben JuJu": Representations of Disraeli's Jewishness in the Victorian Political Cartoon', *Jewish History* 10:2 (1996), p. 91.
[129] Froude, *Life of the Earl of Beaconsfield*, p. 171.
[130] See Todd Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end"', in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli*, pp. 107-8.

D'Israelis that we shall give it insertion'.[131] Rabbi Meir, Taylor explained, was a leader and visionary in his community, but continued to visit his former teacher, who had been stigmatized as a heretic. When remonstrated on his conduct, Rabbi Meir replied, "'I found a savoury nut," said the rabbi, "I kept its kernel, and I threw away its shell".

Taylor was apt in using this image to illustrate D'Israeli and Disraeli's conception of orthodox religious doctrine. The shell was dispensable; the kernel must be salvaged. It remains an unresolved tension in Disraeli's theology that despite his repudiation of Broad Church thinking, he would have shared in Tennyson's resounding outcry, 'cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith!'[132] His anxiety about an imminent post-religious age can also be compared to Tennyson's, 'What will people to in a hundred years? do you think they will give up all religious forms and sit in silence in the Churches listening to the organs?[133]

Disraeli's sense of urgency about the threat to religion informed his view of the complete compatibility between Judaism and Christianity. Neither of them possessed an exclusive claim to ultimate religious truth: rather, they were different manifestations – different 'growths' – of a single truth. It follows that, as J.P. Parry has argued, Disraeli found sectarian strife between different church parties frustratingly detrimental to national unity: 'His greatest irritation was reserved for ecclesiastical factions, which damaged the church's power and popular attractiveness by squabbling among themselves about doctrine and ritual'.[134] Disraeli had expressed this unequivocally in his *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835) when constructing his argument against utilitarianism. The principle of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' failed, Disraeli claimed, because it was unable to account for the deep relativity of human situations. What guaranteed the happiness of the people of Austria was sure to be different from what caused happiness for those in Italy. To

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[131] W.C. Taylor, 'The Late Isaac D'Israeli, Esq., and the Genius of Judaism' *Bentley's Miscellany, 1837-1868*, 23 (Jan 1848), p. 222. For Solomon's prayer of dedication at the Temple, see 1 Kings 8: 22-61. Solomon's prayer is a series of petitions for God to show blessings on Israel. They can be thought to constitute basic reaffirmations of Israel's covenant with God: the need for worship, repentance, forgiveness, and the chosenness of Israel.

[132] See Alfred Tennyson, *Tiresias: and other poems* (London, 1885). See also Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 163-97.

[133] Qtd. in Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion*, p. 163.

[134] Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p. 712.

illustrate his point, Disraeli instanced the manner in which Christian morality grew and evolved over time:

> There have been times, and those not too far gone, when the greatest happiness of Christian nations has been secured by burning men alive for their religious faith; and unless we are prepared to proclaim that all religious creeds, which differ from our own, are in fact not credited by their pretended votaries, we must admit that the greatest happiness of the greatest number of mankind is even now secured, by believing that which we know to be false.[135]

Disraeli acted in accordance with this distinction between essential belief and subsequent doctrine throughout his political career, and made it a main theme in many of his novels. A useful illustration is an incident in 1839, when Disraeli acted as MP for Maidstone. Thomas Duncombe (1796-1861), the radical Chartist supporter, MP for Finsbury, and lifelong friend of Disraeli's, proposed a bill to overturn Lenten restrictions on theatre performances in the borough of Westminster, which had been in place since 1579. Disraeli wanted to vote with Duncombe. He asked his sister Sarah if she would 'look into the books and let me know something about the matter. Is it "ecclesiastical polity" or is a puritanic innov[ati]on? If the latter, I co[ul]d justify my vote'. He asked Sarah to look into how the matter stood 'in James the Ists time and Eliza's?' and also if it was 'alluded to in the Book of Sports? Payne Collier – what says he? Or the other Collier?'[136] This attitude – that the core of the religious idea mattered, but that subsequent dogma should be amended as nations and peoples evolve – caused Disraeli to adopt a conciliatory, rather than a sectarian approach to his own religious principles and his voting on ecclesiastical matters. All churchmen, he thought, should be able to distinguish between the core principles of their faith – on which they should not budge – and on the other hand, incidental matters of policy, which they should sacrifice for the greater ecclesiastical unity of the nation.

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[135] Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution*, p. 8.
[136] Disraeli to Sarah Disraeli, 25 Feb. 1839, *BDL*, iii, p. 148.

V.

'There must be design': the threat of unbelief in *Lothair* (1870)

Lothair (1870), Disraeli's first venture into fiction for 23 years, (since the publication of *Tancred* in 1847), illustrates the un-doctrinal quality of his religious thought in his political and intellectual maturity, and shows his emphasis on the necessity of belief. No longer a Young England parliamentarian trying to work his way up the political ladder, by 1870 we find Disraeli the former prime minister, the man who had worked with Bishop Wilberforce, who had navigated ecclesiastical appointments, and shouted his own anti-Darwinian rhetoric in Oxford. If Disraeli had a message about religious or ecclesiastical doctrine, he finally stood in the most advantageous position for its delivery. Indeed, contemporary and subsequent reviewers read the novel as an anti-Catholic treatise, both because of the political context of its publication and because Disraeli seemed to portray the Roman Catholic Church as insidious, scheming, and immoral. The hero Lothair becomes ensnared in the Roman Catholic campaign of Cardinal Grandison, one of the guardians appointed to him by his deceased father. Grandison was Disraeli's portrait of the Catholic archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Manning, with whom Disraeli had tried in vain to form an alliance during his 1868 ministry. Disraeli hoped to work with Manning to establish a Roman Catholic university in Dublin, which would ease Roman Catholic anger over the persistence of the established Church in Ireland. But when Gladstone announced his support for total disestablishment of the Church in Ireland, Manning went silent in his correspondence with Disraeli and formed an alliance with Gladstone instead. Disraeli thought this alliance had cost him the next election. [137]

For many, fears about the ideological threat of Roman Catholicism escalated even more when in December 1868, the 3rd marquis of Bute, heir to a huge fortune, converted to Rome. Reports following the conversion speculated whether the Marquess's new faith was likely to lead to a wave of similar conversions amongst the ritualist wing of the Anglican

[137] For a detailed account of Disraeli's dealings with Manning over the Irish church disestablishment controversy, see Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), pp. 355-90.

establishment. Recalling the conversions of several Tractarians in the 1830s and 1840s, *Punch* published an article in January 1869 entitled, 'A Noble Pattern to Pusey & Co.'. It satirically considered whether other high Anglicans, such as 'The Rev. Mr. Going', who was 'reported to have celebrated a mimic mass at St. Paul's, Walworth, last Sunday week', would convert to Catholicism as well: 'Is it not high time, Sir, that this Going was gone?'[138] *The Times* predicted that Bute's conversion would cause a stir: 'Some good Protestants will, perhaps, see in it another instance of the awful subtlety of the Roman Catholic priesthood, and of the rapid advance of the Pope towards supreme domination. More, perhaps, will regret the example, and anticipate injurious results'.[139] If *Lothair* was a fictional expression of Disraeli's grudge against Manning, Gladstone, and the pro-Catholic Irish alliance, he certainly published it at an appropriate time.

In keeping with historians' readiness to name political expediency as Disraeli's primary motive, the interpretation of *Lothair* as a work of anti-Catholic revenge and propaganda has characterized both contemporaneous reactions and subsequent analyses of the novel. A contemporary reviewer in the *Atlantic Monthly* wrote that, 'if it can be said to have a ruling idea, that idea is of course to reveal the secret encroachments of the Romish Church'.[140] The *Morning Post* similarly suggested that a suitable subtitle for the novel might be 'Romance of No—Popery'.[141] Blake described the novel as a political reaction to Russell's 'Durham Letter' of 1850, which led to 'a very unflattering picture of the Roman Church and of its English proselytizers and converts'.[142] More recently, Daniel Schwarz claimed that *Lothair*'s popularity could be attributed to 'its anti-Catholicism', while Michael Flavin maintained that 'Disraeli's long-standing attraction to Catholic ritual was [. . .] obliterated by the conduct of the Catholic church as an institution'.[143]

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[138] 'A Noble Pattern to Pusey & Co.', *Punch*, vol. 20, 16 Jan. 1869.
[139] 'It is not many weeks', *The Times*, vol. 6, 4 Jan. 1869, p. 6.
[140] *The Atlantic Monthly*, vol. 26, Aug. 1870, pp. 249-51.
[141] Qtd. in Bogdanor (ed.), *Lothair*, p. xii.
[142] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 300.
[143] Schwarz *Disraeli's Fiction*, p. 127 and Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse*, p. 150. Cf. See Thom Braun, *Disraeli the Novelist* (London, 1981), p 135; O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, pp. 392-4.

These political readings of *Lothair* cause scholars to overlook the message that comes into clear relief when we read the novel with theological awareness: its anti-Darwinist rhetoric. A close reading of *Lothair* within the context of Disraeli's interest in biblical criticism and the changing tides of theology demonstrates that his main concern about the intellectual and ecclesiastical landscape by 1870 was not the sectarian threat of Roman Catholicism, but rather, that scientific accounts of creation would supersede traditional religious understandings of man's place at the helm of God's creation. David Cesarani remains one of the few historians to make this point; he claimed that *Lothair* contains 'some of [Disraeli's] most lucid commentary on religion and science' and that the novel 'makes a passionate case for what would later be dubbed intelligent design and warns that without religion there can be no moral order'.[144] Further, the scholar Nils Clausson has argued convincingly that in Disraeli's portrayal of Roman Catholicism throughout his novels, he drew an important distinction between,

> on the one hand, 'English' Catholics with roots deep in English history and culture, loyal to English institutions, and with only a nominal allegiance to Rome, and on the other hand, recent converts to Roman Catholicism who, by their conversion, have turned their backs on English traditions and institutions, and who believe that only conversion to Rome will save Englishmen in the atheistical and liberal nineteenth century.[145]

Both Cesarani and Clausson have shown that the main message of the novel comes not as an anti-Catholic one, then, but that Disraeli sought to communicate something more general about religious belief, and about its application in England.

Indeed, when situated within the context both of his earlier religious fiction, and especially the intellectual changes wrought by Darwin and the Broad Church, *Lothair* illustrates Disraeli's cry for the supremacy of a steadfast personal faith over institutional allegiance or doctrinal rigidness. And within its broader intellectual history, the novel's main focus emerges as a petition for belief in the face of unbelief. *Lothair* should be read not merely

[144] David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (New Haven, 2016), p. 177.
[145] Nils Clausson, 'English Catholics and Roman Catholicism in Disraeli's Novels', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (1979), p. 455.

as a Protestant cry against Irish disestablishment or encroaching Roman Catholicism, but as a plea for the necessity of religious belief in an age of growing scepticism. Disraeli had become increasingly concerned about what he described in a speech in 1874 as 'the great struggle between the temporal and the spiritual power, which had stamped such indelible features upon the history of the past, [and is] reviving in our own time'.[146] It is within this 'great struggle' that Disraeli intended the novel to speak to the necessity of a unified faith.

Two significant and interconnected themes in *Lothair* suggest that the supremacy of personal faith over atheism dominates the novel's religious politics. The first is Lothair's persistent deliberation not about discrepancies between different religious doctrines, but about the feasibility of belief in a Creator. The second, relatedly, is Lothair's separation of this personal faith from the ecclesiastical constructions in which he becomes involved throughout the novel. Lothair's circuitous search for belief ends in his wholehearted embrace of the Church of England as the sanctuary for his broadly conceived Judeo-Christian theology. While he accepts the institutional and national symbolism of Anglicanism, his personal confessional system remains the Semitically-informed, paradigmatic Christianity which typically provides the fruitful end to a Disraelian hero's search for truth. The novel distinguishes between, on the one hand, an essential belief in God as Creator and as safeguard against the emptiness of scientific materialism, and on the other hand, the problematic particularities of church institutions. This divide between institution and faith comprises the main message of *Lothair*, and reinforces Disraeli's priority in the novel: faith must supersede doubt, and the Church must supersede dangerous, liberal philosophical schools.

In the novel, the orphaned aristocrat Lothair becomes the desired recruit of various religio-political interest groups when he comes of age and inherits an enormous fortune. Lothair is drawn to different faith structures throughout the novel, and while he ultimately turns to Anglicanism, each alternative doctrinal system affirms his conviction that faith is indispensable. From the outset, the reader learns that Lothair's life has been caught between

[146] *M&B*, v, p. 330.

opposing religious allegiances. When his parents die, Lothair is left with two guardians: his uncle, a Scottish Presbyterian, and the Catholic Cardinal Grandison – a thinly veiled Cardinal Manning – who was the private tutor to Lothair's late father, and has since seceded from the Anglican Church and entered the Roman Catholic Church. During Lothair's childhood, his Scottish uncle is sceptical of 'Popish plot[s]' and instils 'every precaution to secure [Lothair's] Protestant principles and to guard the influence, or even personal interference, of his Roman Catholic guardian'.[147]

From the beginning of the novel Disraeli placed his hero in a position to experience the attractions of various religious faiths. This demonstrates Disraeli's emphatic nonsectarian approach to ecclesiastical affiliation, especially in a novel in which the threat of unbelief loomed largest. Lothair becomes enchanted with the sumptuous piety of Catholicism, enamoured of the pious young Catholic, Clare Arundel. He grows close to the Catholic St Jerome family, as well as Cardinal Grandison, Monsignore Catesby, and Father Coleman, each of whom introduce him to Catholic learning. Lothair confides in Cardinal Grandison his fear that society has become faithless and that 'the Church is perplexed; it is ambiguous, contradictory'.[148] Grandison assures Lothair that 'the Church of Christ . . . is never perplexed, never ambiguous, never contradictory. Why should it be? How could it be? The Divine persons are ever with it'.[149] This doctrine of unimpeachable ecclesiastical authority attracts the anxious Lothair, who, like Coningsby and Tancred, worries for the faith of England:

> He felt that he was on the eve of some great event in his existence. One conclusion, however, was indubitable: life must be religion. . . . It seemed to Lothair that nothing could interest him in life that was not symbolical of Divine truths and an adumbration of the celestial hereafter.[150]

But Roman Catholicism is not the only creed that holds appeal or the possibility of faith for Lothair, who soon falls in love with the alluring humanist and Italian revolutionary Theodora Campion, and meets her friend, the hedonistic artist Mr Phoebus. Disraeli based Mr Phoebus

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[147] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 6.
[148] *Ibid*., p. 56.
[149] *Ibid*.
[150] *Ibid*., p. 58.

on Frederic Leighton (1830-1896), the Victorian painter, sculptor, and president of the Royal Academy of Arts, who was known for his portrayal of sensual human bodies. Phoebus and Theodora introduce Lothair to yet another type of faith expression, which further illustrates Disraeli's exploration of broad faithfulness as an antidote to materialism in the novel. In this case, Mr. Phoebus represents a neo-paganist creed that the novel clearly critiques as dangerous and self-governing. Phoebus exalts the human body, and claims that Semitism and Christianity have caused the demise of art: 'Semitism has destroyed art; it taught man to despise his own body, and the essence of art is to honour the human frame. . . . When Leo the Tenth was Pope, popery was pagan; popery is now Christian and art is extinct'.[151] Phoebus's Hellenic doctrine holds that '"beauty and health are the chief sources of happiness"' and offers an antithesis to the stringent Catholic tenets of Grandison.[152] Similarly, Theodora introduces Lothair to her non-denominational theism, explaining, 'I worship in a church where I believe God dwells, and dwells for my guidance and my good: my conscience'.[153] Cardinal Grandison teaches Lothair that as long as he remained outside the Roman Church, he would be 'a Christian estranged . . . a Christian without the consolations of Christianity'.[154] Theodora, on the other hand, convinces Lothair that orthodoxy is exclusive and arbitrary, and encourages him to abandon it: '"So you see . . . what is called orthodoxy has very little to do with religion; and a person may be very religious without holding the same dogmas as yourself, or, as some think, without holding any"'.[155]

Disraeli introduced Mr Phoebus's and Theodora's humanistic understandings of life, art, and the divine in order to demonstrate the scientific and humanist threats to traditional religious structures. Lothair becomes 'agitated by many thoughts' and 'considerable speculation on religion, the Churches, the solar system, the cosmical order, the purpose of Creation, and the destiny of man'.[156] He feels torn between Theodora's theology of conscience,

[151] *Ibid.*, p. 106.
[152] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[153] *Ibid.*, p. 126.
[154] *Ibid.*, p. 56.
[155] *Ibid.*, pp. 125-26.
[156] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

and his Roman Catholic alleigances; he continues to appease the Monsignori, St Jeromes, and Cardinal Grandison with talks of plans to use his inheritance to build a Roman Catholic cathedral in Westminster.

Within this perplexity, Lothair questions the origins of existence as they are portrayed by new scientific understandings of Nature. He wonders: 'Chance, necessity, atomic theories, nebular hypotheses, development, evolution, the origin of worlds, human ancestry; here were high topics on none of which was there lack of argument; and, in a certain sense, evidence; and what then?'[157] Nevertheless Lothair remains adamant that there is a Creator and an inherent order within Creation. His conclusion – '"There must be design"' – becomes the singular belief that he holds, unchanged, throughout the novel; it alone remains untouched by the various doctrines he courts. Lothair's main philosophical struggle arises not from the complicated politics of the institutions that attempt to recruit him. Instead, his confusion comes from the theories of the 'new philosophers' and 'distinguished men of science' who seem to deny 'direct relations between God and man':

> There must be design. The reasoning and research of all philosophy could not be valid against that conviction. If there were no design, why, it would all be nonsense; and he could not believe in nonsense . . . But between the all-wise and the all-benevolent and man, according to the new philosophers, no relations were to be any longer acknowledged. They renounce in despair the possibility of bringing man into connexion with that First Cause which they can neither explain nor deny. But man requires that there shall be direct relations between the created and the Creator; and that in those relations he should find a solution of the perplexities of existence.[158]

Here Lothair deployed the frustrations Disraeli had expressed on his walk with Edward Stanley, about the conflating between scientific and religious forms of questioning. Through the novel, Disraeli demonstrates that science and religion account for different things. Science speaks to 'everything except the only point on which men require revelation', while religion

[157] *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.
[158] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

points to the inscrutable design of the universe.[159] Rather than unpicking the delicate dogmatic differences between Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Theodora's humanism, Lothair remains preoccupied with the sheer conceivability of intelligent design as the basis of the creation of the world. He engages with the possibility of human order not through political or ecclesiastical reorganisation, but through individual religious revelation.

This Disraelian religious idea – that an unassailable personal faith was more important than a certain sectarian identification – becomes ossified in the novel when the Vatican successfully conspires to convert Lothair in St Peter's in Rome. They spread the story that Lothair received a miraculous visitation from the Virgin Mary while he lies in bed recovering from battle. Upon reading the newspaper article in which his visitation from the Virgin is explained and his conversion to Catholicism announced, Lothair feels 'as one sinking into an unfathomable abyss . . . All his life during the last year passed rushingly across his mind'.[160] The realisation that his Roman Catholic friends have betrayed him launches Lothair into an existential crisis. However, we must read carefully to interpret Disraeli's religious message. Lothair despairs not because of any infidelity to the Anglican Church entailed in his supposed conversion to Catholicism, nor because of his now broken promise to Theodora not to convert. Rather, he despairs at the loss of his own conscience, will, and personal faith. Lothair's overriding fear in the novel is not of misplaced ecclesiastical allegiance, but loss of self-identity and ultimately, loss of his own sense of God.

Through this message in *Lothair*, Disraeli warned his readers about the challenges to their personal piety that would come from new schools of thought. This becomes more important to the novel's plot than any difference between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism. Disraeli demonstrated this in Lothair's belief that a genuine conversion to Rome for theological and intellectual reasons would have been painful enough, given the tension

[159] *Ibid*. For science and religion in the Victorian novel, see John Kucich, 'Intellectual Debate in the Victorian Novel: Religion and Science' in Deirdre David (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, (Cambridge, 2012) pp. 107-28.
[160] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 276.

between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism, but that losing his sense of self was far more painful:

> In what a position of unexampled pain did he not now find himself! To feel it your duty to quit the faith in which you have been bred must involve an awful pang; but to be a renegade without the consolation of your conscience, against your sense, against your will, alike for no celestial hope and no earthly object, this was agony mixed with self-contempt.[161]

Lothair only become depressed and contemplates suicide when he faces total religious aimlessness. In his desperate analysis of his misfortune, he repeatedly despairs at the notion of himself as a 'renegade': 'But, now, there was not a single circumstance to sustain his involved and sinking life. A renegade, a renegade without conviction, without necessity'.[162] Lothair's desolation arises not from his involuntary conversion to Catholicism in particular, but from suddenly finding himself without a faith structure, in a universe and personal value system without 'design'. This, for Disraeli, represented the ultimate dystopia.

As a contrast to this faithless dystopia, towards the end of the novel Disraeli places Lothair in the antithesis of such a reality: Israel. On the Mount of Olives, Lothair meets Paraclete, a mysterious Syrian gentleman whose name in Greek means Holy Spirit (or occasionally Christ) and can be translated as "comforter," "advocate," or "intercessor".[163] 'Paraclete' appears in the New Testament, principally in John's gospel, in which it is used to refer to the Holy Ghost.[164] The Authorized Version does not use the term 'Paraclete'; it uses the translation of 'Comforter'. Thus Disraeli's choice of the original Greek term is interesting, though *parakletos* is the kind of word an educated Englishman would know. Many readers would recognize the biblical reference and interpret it as a stark contrast to the humanist materialism that the novel also represents.

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[161] *Ibid*.
[162] *Ibid*., p. 281.
[163] Just like many of the references in *Alroy*, this reference suggests that Disraeli's biblical knowledge ran deeper than historians have allowed. For Disraeli's similar use of biblical language in *Sybil* (1845), see Lessenich, 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England' in *Jewish Life and Suffering as Mirrored in English and American Literature*, p. 38.
[164] See John 14.16, 14.26, 15.26, and 16.7.

With Paraclete, Lothair revisits his religious confusion and the growing power of scientific explanations of existence: "'And yet there are persons at the present day who doubt, even deny, the spiritual nature of man . . . I do not, I could not . . . But there are people now who tell you that there never was any Creation, and therefore there never could have been a Creator'".[165] Paraclete's response, in language and meaning, repeats and affirms Lothair's initial faith in the design of the universe:

> There must be design, or all we see would be without sense, and I do not believe in the unmeaning. As for the natural forces to which all creation is now attributed, we know they are unconscious, while consciousness is as inevitable a portion of our existence as the eye or hand. The conscious cannot be derived from the unconscious. . . . Why we are here, whence we come, whither we go, these are questions which man is organically framed and forced to ask himself, and that would not be the case if they could not be answered.[166]

Paraclete's private faith, unmediated by church institution, provides the model for Lothair's similar newfound religious identity. Paraclete speaks of his ancient ties to Galilee and his ability to forge a direct connection with Christ without the intervention of religious authorities. As in *Tancred*, through Paraclete Disraeli emphasises the Holy Land as a locus of religious purity, in contrast with subsequent religious institutions,

> I bow before the Divine decree that swept them away from Antioch to Jerusalem, but I am not yet prepared to transfer my spiritual allegiance to Italian Popes and Greek Patriarchs. We believe that our family were among the first followers of Jesus, and that we then held lands in Bashan which we hold now. . . . So I am content to dwell in Galilee and trace the footsteps of my Divine Master; musing over His life and pregnant sayings amid the mounts He sanctified and the waters He loved so well.[167]

During Paraclete's tutelage of Lothair, the question of Catholic vs. Protestant doctrine remains notably absent. Instead, he encourages Lothair to adopt a strong personal faith with direct connection to religious truth. Paraclete rescues Lothair from unbelief, not from Roman Catholicism in particular.

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[165] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 314.
[166] *Ibid.*, pp. 315-16.
[167] *Ibid.*, pp. 316-17.

Scholars have interpreted the end of the novel as a conventional Disraelian political message. Lothair returns to England, becomes master of his estates, and marries the Anglican daughter of an English duke. These all fulfil his destiny as an English aristocrat and reinforce Disraeli's well-known promotion of the Church of England as vital protector and guarantor of the British constitution. But the novel's ending represents more than Michael Flavin's conclusion that 'Lothair fulfils his duty to his country by returned to England and an English woman, resisting the temptations of foreigners and foreign faiths'.[168] Daniel Schwarz was much closer to the mark when he argued that the hero comes to understand that people of the nation should 'believe in a controlling deity to which they are morally responsible'.[169]

Indeed, the conclusion of *Lothair* represents Disraeli's belief that a strong, broad individual faith can and must exist within the institutional and national system of Church and constitution. In advocating for the supremacy of the Church of England, however, Disraeli distinguished himself from the conventional Protestant sectarian cry. In his nuanced portrayal of contending faith positions, the categories of Catholicism, nationalism, humanism, and Anglicanism evade monolithic definitions. Lothair's journey takes him through the darker caverns of institutional corruption and he discovers the dangerous hunger for power that can belie religious proclamations. Yet even after he adopts Paraclete's Judeo-Christian theism and realises that belief in God can exist outside the perplexing folds of extremist ideology, his faith remains coloured by the plethora of philosophies he entertains throughout the novel. He remains friends with the St Jerome family, Clare Arundel, and even Cardinal Grandison, and retains elements of his fascination with Catholicism. Indeed, even after they betray him and use him as their pawn, Lothair could not 'passively submit to an estrangement from those who had conferred on him so much kindness, and whose ill-considered and injurious courses, as he now esteemed them, were perhaps, and probably, influenced and inspired by exalted, even sacred motives'.[170] Lothair understands Roman Catholic motives to stem from sincere moral

[168] Flavin, *Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse*, p. 167.
[169] Schwarz, *Disraeli's Fiction*, p. 134.
[170] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 328.

principles, even if their actions become discreditable. Moreover, the persistent piety of Cardinal Grandison, Clare Arundel, and the St Jerome family renders them sympathetic in the novel's religious system, in which unbelief poses the true threat to self and society. Lothair's multifarious faith – informed by the traditions of the Holy Land, the doctrines of Judaism, the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church, and a renewed spiritual connection between East and West – overshadows and defeats scientific systems which would have him question the design of the universe. Lothair's entanglement with various sympathetically-portrayed religious institutions illustrates that for Disraeli, the ultimate danger facing the Church was the lack of belief, the hollowness, and the moral relativism that, as Lothair discovers, results from an un-designed universe.[171]

This cry for belief remains consistent with Disraeli's own arguments during the Catholic issues of the 1860s. For example, he wanted to support Lord Campden's Prison Ministers Bill, which would, in Campden's word, 'give[e] equal religious provision to R[oman] Catholic prisoners'. Disraeli 'anticipate[d], however, in that respect, no little difficulty'; he told Campden that he doubted he could animate votes from conservative Anglicans in the wake of the 'systematic hostility allows shown by the Catholic members of the House of Commons to the Church of England'. Disraeli was frustrated by Roman Catholic MPs' inability to make a distinction between essential tenets of faith and subsidiary matters of doctrine. They should vote more broadly and ecumenically when it came to matters of Church and State. He instanced Charles de Montalembert, the Catholic noble, as an example of a right-minded religious actor. Though Montalembert was a close friend of J.H. Newman and the Tractarians, he strongly opposed ultramontanism and called for the Roman Catholic Church to disentangle itself from government control.[172] He was also the same circle as Ambrose de Lisle Phillipps,

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[171] See David Brooks, 'Disraeli's Novels: Religion and Identity' in Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (eds.), *Studies in Church History* 48 (Woodbridge, 2012), pp. 337-48. Brooks argues that Disraeli's novels imagined an ideal unity between Judaism and Christianity that would end rivalries between Christian sects.

[172] Christopher Guyver, 'Montalembert, Charles-René-Forbes de, comte de Montalembert in the French nobility (1810–1870)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/107173]. See Montalembert, *Catholic Interests in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1852), and *The Obligation of Catholics in the Matter of Freedom of Teaching* (London, 1843).

a likeminded Catholic and Young Englander whom Disraeli portrayed as the archetype of Catholic unity in *Sybil*. Disraeli made the case to Campden,

> We live in times when Churches should act together. I do not expect Catholic members, generally, to vote, for instance, for Church rates, though were I a Catholic I would do so, but at least they might keep away from such divisions. There would be no difficulty about Prison Ministers bills, and many other measures of that description, if men of the position of Mr. Monsell would only act in church affairs as Montalembert recommended.[173]

William Monsell – another Catholic whom Disraeli 'mention[ed] [because] both by position and talents he is a leading man, and might exercise even a more considerable influence' – should implement a similar broad mindedness when it came to voting. 'If the Churches drew more together', Disraeli claimed, then sectarian strife would dissipate and 'sink into insignificance'.[174] In his famous speech to an audience in Manchester in 1872 on 'Conservative Principles', Disraeli reiterated his point that religious diversity was infinitely preferable to irreligion.

> It is said that the existence of Nonconformity proves that the Church is a failure. I draw from these premises an exactly contrary conclusion; and I maintain that to have secured a national profession of faith with the unlimited enjoyment of private judgment in matters spiritual is the solution of the most difficult problem, and one of the triumphs of civilisation.[175]

The institutional and sectarian discrepancies between varying churches and church parties were less important to Disraeli than his desire for them to uphold religiosity – in whatever form it may take – in the face of scientific materialism and doubt. Informed by the scriptural language, themes, and morality, and ritual practice that continued to shape Victorian ideology, *Lothair* demonstrates Disraeli's survey of varying faith models, ecclesiastical structures, and the evidence and intellectual process behind belief in the Creator and created. His religious ideas, practice, and view of doctrine disrupts the narrative of Disraeli as a modern pragmatist and proto-atheist, who somehow transcended the religious controversies

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[173] *BDL* viii, pp. 265-6, Disraeli to Lord Campden, 10 Apr. 1863.
[174] *Ibid*.
[175] T.E. Kebbel, *Selected Speeches of the Late Right Honourable the Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1882).

of his time. While cunning in politics and often enigmatic in personality Disraeli was nevertheless entrenched in Victorian paradigms of the necessity of religious truth, even in his time of fast-paced intellectual change.

CHAPTER 4

RACE

> 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' and by the various families of nations the designs of the Creator are accomplished. God works by races, and one was appointed in due season and after many developments to reveal and expound in this land the spiritual nature of man.[1]

In Disraeli's *Tancred* (1847), the sagacious Sidonia famously claims to a captivated dinner party, '"All is race; there is no other truth"'. [2] Historians have persistently cited this maxim as evidence that Disraeli was primarily a racial thinker, who believed that history could be explained by biological differences between races, rather than by a Judeo-Christian conception of providence. But it is important to remember that Sidonia's words are clarified by Lord Henry, one of the keen listeners at the dinner table. '"Because it includes all others?"' he asks. '"You have said it"', replies Sidonia. This chapter argues that the neglect of Lord Henry's reply to Sidonia's 'creed of race', and its conceptual implications, has had significant consequences in the historiography of race in Disraeli's thought. Lord Henry rightly implied that Sidonia's – and Disraeli's – understanding of 'race' was indivisible from, and 'included all other' truths to which he subscribed. Indeed, Disraeli's use of race was shaped by the religious assumptions that informed the domain of racial science itself. Further, his notion of race as the 'key to history' remained firmly fixed within a religious metanarrative, with God as creator and perpetuator of human life and society. In Disraeli's words, 'the divine government of this world' has 'ordained that the sacred purposes should be effected by the instrumentality of various human races'.[3]

The first section focuses on historians' claims about Disraeli as a racial thinker. It addresses the notion that has persisted from Robert Blake in 1966, to Endelman and Kushner

[1] Benjamin Disraeli, *Lothair* (1870; Oxford, 1975), p. 314.
[2] *Idem*., *Tancred* (1847; London, 1927), p. 153.
[3] *Idem*., 'General Preface' in *Lothair* (1870; London, 1881), p. xvi.

in 2002: that Disraeli's 'own views on race and religions' were 'highly idiosyncratic'.[4] To challenge this claim, the second section then turns to Disraeli's theories in the context of racial discourse in nineteenth-century Britain. It suggests that the idea of Disraeli as a racial, rather than religious thinker relies on a false antithesis between race and religion in the nineteenth century. Such an idea assumes that Disraeli's understanding of racial differences between peoples precluded an equally serious understanding of certain peoples as chosen by God for particular religious destinies. In fact, Disraeli's views are better understood when resituated within a nineteenth-century British intellectual landscape that remained invested in theological conceptions of peoples, individuals, and nations. The final section returns to Disraeli's statements about race in his fiction and non-fiction, in order to recover the significant theological conceptions that informed them, just as they informed most of the dominant racial discourse in nineteenth-century Britain.

[4] Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966), p. 194. Cf. Todd Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness* (London, 2002), p. 6.

I.

'A racial thinker'?: The historiography of Disraeli and race

We have seen that Victorian thinkers took a markedly different approach to Disraeli's religious thought from that adopted by subsequent biographers and historians in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The same is true for the historiography of Disraeli's views on race. Nineteenth-century commentators, like Disraeli himself, used the category of 'race' to make complicated claims about the spiritual and temperamental inheritance of peoples. Much of the secondary literature on Disraeli published in the twentieth century suggested, however, that Disraeli was predominantly a racial, rather than a religious thinker. It is worth recalling some of these historiographical claims in more detail. As we shall see, Disraeli's intellectual context and a reassessment of his own statements about race require a reconsideration.

J.A. Froude and Charles Alexander Ewald understood Disraeli's pride in the Jewish race as part of an equivalent religious understanding of the Jews as the chosen people of God. Ewald claimed that Disraeli praised his Jewish background and the Jewish race primarily because of its religious nobility. In Ewald's words, a 'man who was of the same family to which it had pleased the Son of God, in His infinite condescension, to attach Himself, had no reason to be ashamed of his birth'.[5] Froude similarly assumed that Disraeli acclaimed the Jewish race because, as Froude put it, Disraeli 'receives with full and entire conviction the fact that a revelation was really made to his forefathers'.[6] These conflations of Disraeli's racial identity and religious position, problematic though they may seem in the present, actually illuminate the manner in which Disraeli himself conceived of his Jewish identity. Froude, Ewald, and Disraeli shared an intellectual milieu in which claims about the racial superiority of the Jews fused with the special position of Israelites in Jewish and Christian thought. Isaac D'Israeli's

[5] Alexander Charles Ewald, *The Right Hon. Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield, and his Times* (5 vols., London, 1882), i, pp. 5-6.
[6] James Anthony Froude, *Life of the Earl of Beaconsfield* (London, 1890), pp. 169-70.

literary works on the Jews – which, as we have seen, provided an important source for Disraeli's own beliefs about Judaism – claimed that the Jews were held together as a people by their irrevocable connection to their religious foundation through Moses. In the novel *Vaurien* (1797), D'Israeli had created the character of a Jewish philosopher who explained the distinction of the Jewish people not by their physical or genetic identities – 'children of Jacob are composed of all nations' and 'include all the varieties of the human species'[7] – but by 'the divine institution of their religion'.[8]

This deep interconnection between racial and religious claims in the nineteenth century gave way to new trends in historical writing in the twentieth century. Lady Battersea's well-known comment about Disraeli after his death, that 'his racial instincts were his religion and he was true to that religion until he drew his last breath', took on a new meaning.[9] Instead of indicating the fusion of Disraeli's racial and religious ideas– in the style of Froude's comments – it was assumed that she meant to imply that Disraeli believed in a system of racial and evolutionary development in lieu of God. Rather than perceiving Disraeli's reverence for the Jews as connected to his notion of their exceptional status in the eyes of God in the Old Testament – one completely and consequentially connected to their racial gifts – historians, beginning with Monypenny and Buckle, erroneously separated Disraeli's views about race from his religious beliefs.[10]

Instead of beginning with the context of Tractarianism and literary medievalism, as did J.A. Froude, in his discussion of *Tancred* W.F. Monypenny began with the claim that, 'The ruling sentiment of *Tancred* . . . is intense pride of race; its underlying philosophy is Disraeli's philosophy of race. Race even lies at the root of all his conceptions of religion'.[11] Robert Blake and Arthur Frietzsche similarly concluded that Disraeli's fascination with Judaism amounted to his need to create, as Frietzsche put it, an 'imagined racial aristocracy' which would, Blake

[7] Isaac D'Israeli, *Vaurien* (2 vols., London, 1787), ii., pp. 215, 224.
[8] *Idem*., *The Genius of Judaism* (London, 1833), p. 16.
[9] Endelman and Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 2.
[10] Stanley Weintraub, *Disraeli* (London, 1993) is an exception to this rule.
[11] *M&B*, iii, p. 5.

claimed, 'vindicate [Disraeli's] own Jewish descent' and give him the pedigree he needed to join the British establishment.[12] Indeed, Frietzsche explicitly argued that 'the moment that we can separate race and religion in his thinking we find that it is race which kindled his enthusiasm'.[13] Thus by racial aristocracy, Frietzsche and Blake assumed that Disraeli meant biological superiority rather than religious pedigree. Hannah Arendt helped to reinforce this notion when she argued in 1968 that Disraeli's extravagant claims about the superiority of the Jewish race rested on an absence of any knowledge or interest in Jewish faith practices, a thesis later expanded upon by Isaiah Berlin.[14]

This emergence of Disraeli as more of a racial than religious thinker continued to solidify in the 1990s. An important example of this ossification is John Vincent's *Disraeli* (1990), in which Vincent devoted a discrete chapter to 'Disraeli as Racial Thinker', which came directly before that of 'Disraeli: Christian or Jew?'[15] His chapter chronology was significant. It represented Vincent's general claim that 'race, for [Disraeli], transcended everything: it explained religion; it explained politics', and therefore Disraeli should be considered 'far more of a racial than a social or religious thinker'.[16] By race, Vincent understood Disraeli to mean not a cultural allegiance but 'purity of blood', in a strictly biological sense.[17] While he could see that Disraeli perceived 'race as a basis for traditional monotheism', Vincent ultimately concluded that 'race, and racial superiority were at the heart of Disraeli's concept of Jewishness – religion being present but subordinate'.[18] There remains good reason to nuance Vincent's dichotomy between claims of racial and religious superiority.

In fact, Vincent himself made reference to an unpublished MSc thesis by David Dinkin, entitled 'The Racial and Political Ideas of Benjamin Disraeli' (1979), which had expressed a

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[12] Cf. Robert Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966), p. 204; Arthur H. Frietzsche, *Disraeli's Religion: the treatment of religion in Disraeli's novels* (Utah, 1961), p. 16.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 11.
[14] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1968) and Isaiah Berlin, 'Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx and the Search for Identity', in Henry Hardy (ed.), *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Oxford, 1981).
[15] John Vincent, *Disraeli* (Oxford, 1990), p. 38.
[16] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[17] *Ibid*. Vincent does allow that this strictly biological definition was part of a wider 'pseudo-scientific racial thought'.
[18] *Ibid*., pp. 34-5.

different conclusion from Vincent's. Dinkin suggested that Disraeli used racial language and interpreted history through race in a manner that was, to a certain extent, unsurprising considering the growing language of racial science in nineteenth-century Britain. But he took pains to demonstrate that this interest in race was inseparable from Disraeli's religious and philosophical investments:

> In no sense was Disraeli purely and simply a racial theorist; his racial ideas were of interest and use to him only when applied to his political and religious philosophy, his peculiar brand of historical interpretation and general world view.[19]

Not only did Disraeli's racial vocabulary combine with his political and religious philosophy: for Dinkin, it became a means of expressing them. While Vincent claimed that Disraeli placed race over religion, Dinkin argued the reverse dynamic: that Disraeli's racial claims acted as a mode through which he asserted his religious and political beliefs. Racial language functioned as a seemingly more objective lexicon through which he could express what was essentially the spiritual superiority of the Jews. As Dinkin put it, 'at least part of the reason why Disraeli wrote about the Jews in terms of racial superiority, was his wish to establish in more intellectual and less romantic terms than before, the importance of Judaism to Western civilization'.[20] In the novels, further, Dinkin claimed that spiritual attachments, rather than racial arguments, govern Disraeli's heroes, because the novels were essentially a way for Disraeli to negotiate the tensions within his own Judeo-Christian confessional position. Sidonia may have used a racial vocabulary to describe the superiority of the Jews, suggested Dinkin, but 'it is Tancred's pilgrimage to Jerusalem for "Asian spirituality"' that demonstrated the core of Disraeli's project in *Tancred*: 'to reconcile his Jewish origins with his own Christian religion'.[21]

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[19] David Dinkin, 'The Racial and Political Ideas of Benjamin Disraeli' (University of Bristol, MSc in Social Sciences, Race Relations, 1979), pp. 9, 31.
[20] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[21] *Ibid*., p. 9. It is also worth noting that Dinkin's degree was in Social Sciences and Race Relations. This focused his discussion on the extent to which Disraeli subscribed to 'either polygenetic or evolutionary ideas'; the conclusion was that Disraeli's 'religious philosophy and anti-materialistic standpoint largely prohibited him' from doing so'.

Dinkin's thesis made an important qualification to the narrative – sustained by Arendt and Berlin – of Disraeli as purely a racial thinker. But this modification did not seem to inform the dominant historiography of Disraeli's Jewishness over the next decade. Todd Endelman, while revising Arendt and Berlin's thesis, nevertheless argued that Disraeli's 'racial chauvinism' in the 1840s comprised the 'core of his Jewishness', claiming that aside from the racial theories, 'it had little or no other content'.[22] Endelman argued that Disraeli used race retrospectively to claim, a 'noble status . . . in the soil of ancient Israel'.[23] In Endelman's framework, the Israelites of the Bible, rather than connected to Disraeli's entire notion of the Jewish race in the first place – as we have seen was the case in *Alroy* – supplied a supplementary example that Disraeli used to sustain a purely racial argument about the Jews. In Endelman's words, the Jews of the Bible 'gave [Disraeli's] racial thinking an extra dimension'.[24] The assumption persisted, therefore, that an on-going self-justification lay at the root of Disraeli's ideology, in which assertions of racial superiority acted as the primary instruments. Indeed, Simone Beate Borgstede's recent monograph on the subject of Disraeli's racial thought largely reflects Hannah Arendt's thesis. Borgstede aims to show that 'the discourse of race [Disraeli] invented in defence of the anti-Semitism he experienced' informed his imperial policy.[25] Borgstede demonstrated that Disraeli's racial ideas were 'welded together with other categories of difference like gender, class, culture and nation'. [26] But the complicated relationship between racial claims and religious investments remained unexplored.

This recent historiography has consistently underestimated the extent to which biblical and theological investments shaped racial and scientific ideas in the nineteenth-

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[22] Todd M. Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end": the emergence of Disraeli's Jewishness' in Charles Richmond and Paul Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851* (1998), pp. 119-20. Endelman's revision of the Arendt and Berlin theory was the fact that Disraeli took his racial ideas seriously, however outrageous they were.
[23] *Ibid*., pp. 122-3.
[24] *Ibid*. For other examples of the religious content in the novels being interpreted as strategic evidence to support Disraeli's racial theories, see Todd M. Endelman and Tony Kushner (eds.), *Disraeli's Jewishness*, p. 1; Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), p. 222.
[25] Simone Beate Borgstede, *'All is Race': Benjamin Disraeli on Race, Nation, and Empire* (Munster, 2011), p. 22.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 29.

century intellectual atmosphere in which Disraeli made his statements about race. As Disraeli himself put it in 1870, 'scientific invention has always gone on simultaneously with the revelation of spiritual truths'.[27]

[27] Disraeli, 'General Preface' in *Lothair*, p. xvii.

II.

Spiritual genes: the race idea in Disraeli's nineteenth-century Britain

No fixed or objective notion of 'race' dominated the intellectual context in which Disraeli developed his racial thought. The language of racial science that burgeoned and expanded to include philology, ethnology, and anthropology in the course of the nineteenth century had emerged from the Enlightenment as a more empirical mode of understanding socially-constructed categories.[28] In fact, the race idea materialized as a highly politicized category; far from empirical, it was invoked in the place of other agendas: class, religious allegiance, nationality. Rather than referring to a strictly biological or physiological identity, race denoted a complex cluster of cultural assumptions. The racial language that permeated political discourse and especially foreign policy was far more interested in the virtuosity and political maturity of 'races' than in their biological characteristics. England's attitudes towards the Bulgarian atrocities of the 1870s, for example, reflected, in Jonathan Parry's words, 'not the notion of ethnic nationalism', but rather, 'that of constitutional liberty against oppressive alien regimes'.[29] Peter Mandler has also critiqued historians' hastiness in making too much of the nineteenth-century preoccupation with race as a way of explaining Victorian attitudes and culture. As he aptly put it, the period 'witnessed not a Darwinian triumph but a melee of competing and contradictory – and, often, self-confessedly confused – accounts of the evolution of the human animal'.[30] Bryan Cheyette has also stressed a 'radical emptiness and lack of a fixed meaning' within racial discourse which, in the case of Jews, resulted in '"the Jew" being

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[28] Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (London, 1996), p. 6. For race as an unstable, culturally constructed concept throughout history, see Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600-2000* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 1-18. For race as a 'cultural-biological' concept, see Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London, 1987), p. 43. For discontinuity and contradictions within the rise of racial discourse, see Douglas A. Lorimer, 'Race, science and culture: historical continuities and discontinuities, 1850-1914' in Shearer West (ed.), *The Victorians and Race* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 12-33. See also Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1991); Hannah Franziska Augstein, *Race: The Origins of an Idea, 1760-1850* (Bristol, 1996); Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (Connecticut, 1982).

[29] Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism: English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe, 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 15.

[30] Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), p. 72; see pp. 72-86.

made to occupy an incommensurable number of subject positions which traverse a range of contradictory discourses'.[31]

Given its elasticity, religious investments, and specifically, the Bible, had a particularly salient, and under-recognised role in shaping race as a category in the nineteenth-century imagination.[32] Colin Kidd has changed the conversation about race in the nineteenth century in demonstrating that 'scripture has been for much of the early modern and modern eras the primary cultural influence on the forging of races'.[33] This understanding – what Kidd calls the 'scriptural provenance of the race question' – problematizes the suggestion that Disraeli was more of a racial than a religious thinker.[34] Because Disraeli's idea of race was wrapped up in his conception of religious, nationalist, and political inheritance, the purpose of this section is to highlight the indivisible and complicated relationship between religious and racial thought in nineteenth-century Britain, in order to demonstrate that the racial *Zeitgeist* in which Disraeli participated sustained a changing, but nevertheless fundamentally religious understanding of the peoples of the world.

The rise of racial 'science' in the nineteenth century had a complex entanglement with concurrent anxieties over the veracity of Christian orthodoxy and scripture.[35] This led many Christian racial scientists and intellectuals on a quest to vindicate a monogenetic understanding of creation: the idea that, as the Bible specified, all humans descended from Adam and Eve. For many Christians with serious commitments to the literal truth of the Bible, such as Disraeli's own parliamentary counterpart George Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll (1823-1900), monogenesis had to be protected as an undeniable fact if the entire legitimacy of

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[31] Bryan Cheyette, *Constructions of 'the Jew' in English Literature and Society* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 8. For the centrality of 'the Jewish question' to English national identity, see Michael Ragussis, 'The Birth of a Nation in Victorian Culture: The Spanish Inquisition, the Converted Daughter, and the "Secret Race"', *Critical Inquiry* 20:3 (1994), pp. 477-508.
[32] For the manner in which religious Jews regarded themselves as a people bound together by God, rather than by any biological or racial connection, see David Cesarani *The Jewish Chronicle and Anglo-Jewry, 1841-1991* (Cambridge, 1994) and Anne Cowen and Roger Cowen, *Victorian Jews through British Eyes* (Oxford, 1986).
[33] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, p. 19. See also Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (2 vols., London, 1966-1970), i, pp. 558-72 for the similar Christian foundations of geology.
[34] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, p. 22.
[35] See *Ibid.*, pp. 121-67.

Scripture itself were not be dismantled. Disraeli did not see himself as a biblical literalist. His own racial theories tended towards an opposite interpretation: polygenesis. For example, Sidonia advises Coningsby that the 'pure races of Caucasus' can only be despised by 'the brutal ignorance of some mongrel breed'.[36] This might suggest that he subscribed to an altogether un-biblical notion of races as biologically diverse from the beginning, each developing different physical and mental attributes throughout history. Certainly a growing branch of racial and philological science –epitomized by Emile Burnouf's *La Science des Religions* (1864-9) – began to treat religion as a subspecies of race. For Burnouf, religious temperament arose as a product of the mental, linguistic, and physical attributes that characterized racial identity. To which strand of these flourishing and highly problematic tendencies did Disraeli subscribe: monogenesis or polygenesis?

Disraeli's racial ideas, like his religious ideas, defy such easy categorization. The extent to which these two complicated aspects of Disraeli's thought informed each other requires amplification in the conversation about Disraeli and race. When we consider some of Disraeli's sources of racial truth, it becomes clear that he joined in a widespread and pervasive intellectual tension between new scientific theories of race and evolution on the one hand, and the unassailable authority of religious traditions on the other. It is important to consider Disraeli within the wider context of religious intellectuals who, in Kidd's words, sought to 'accommodate science, anthropology, and biblical criticism with a revised version of scriptural history which conserved its core truths'.[37] In the thorny debates about the infallibility of the Bible, or about the static truth of certain aspects of orthodox doctrine, Disraeli did not come down clearly on any particular side. Just as soon as he had condemned Darwin or the writers of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), he extolled Renan's *Vie de Jésus* (1864) and *Études d'histoire religieuse* (1858) to his correspondents. Disraeli called Renan's *Étude* on the Song of Solomon, for example, 'the most fascinating, & the most complete interpretation in the world', despite

[36] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 221. For other examples of other monogenists committed to biblical literalism, see Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, pp. 121-8.
[37] Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, *p.* 129.

Renan's claims elsewhere that the Semitic mind suffered an imaginative deficiency that rendered it inferior to the Aryan.[38] As we recall from Froude's analysis of *Tancred*, Disraeli despised Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), particularly the notion that the complexity of human existence could be explained by evolution. As Tancred put it, soberly, "'I do not believe I ever was a fish'".[39]

A picture emerges of Disraeli as a thinker immersed in an interplay between racial, scientific, and religious discourse. Disraeli's comments about race must be considered within this convoluted line of questioning about physical, moral, and religious truth. In accordance with a growing proportion of racial commentators, Disraeli understood racial difference to entail not merely physical differences, but also deep and inscrutable variations in spiritual and religious capacity.[40] His statements about race consistently illuminate the non-physical qualities that bound themselves up with the race idea. In a speech against Irish church disestablishment in April 1868, Disraeli typified his view of races; that they embodied a set of characteristics and spiritual temperaments, rather than a purely ethnic identity, shared by a people or nation. He described the Irish as such, and cried for them to change their narrative of racial conquest.

> [The Irish people] have engaging qualities, which I think every man who has any heart must regard. But I must say nothing surprises me more than the general conduct of the Irish people on this subject of sentimental grievances. They are a race who are certainly among the bravest of the brave, most ingenious, witty, very imaginative, and therefore very sanguine; but for them to go about the world announcing that they are a conquered race does appear to me the most extraordinary thing in the world. Every one of us, nations and individuals, are said to have a skeleton in the house . . . But for the Irish ostentatiously to declare that they are a conquered race is very strange. If they really are a conquered race, they are not the people who ought to announce it. It is the conquerors from whom we should learn the fact; for it is not the conquered who should go about the world and announce their shame and humiliation. But I entirely deny that the Irish are a conquered race.[41]

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[38] *BDL*, viii, p. 182, Disraeli to Lord Elmley, 9 May 1863.
[39] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 113.
[40] For the link between race and religious and philosophical investments, see Lorimer, 'Race, science and culture: historical continuities and discontinuities, 1850-1914', in West (ed.), *The Victorians and Race*, pp. 13-16. For the close relationship between race and nationalism, see Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, especially pp. 13-26.
[41] Hansard, *Parl. Debs*, 3rd ser., CXCI, 906, 3 Apr. 1868.

Disraeli described the Irish race through a series of adjectives about their national personality.

Much of his writing about race to his close friend, correspondent, and fellow Jewish-Anglican convert, Sarah Brydges Willyams ran along similar lines. His opaque description of his and Willyams' common Jewish origins as 'the mysterious sympathy wh[ich] binds us together'[42] or the 'mysterious sympathy of organisation' testifies to the convoluted and spiritual notion of race within Disraeli's mind.[43] The 'mysterious sympathy' to which he alluded had more to do with the spiritual character, morality, and intellect of the Semites than their physical or genetic constitution. This represented a widespread way of thinking about race by the mid-nineteenth century. Indeed, in the final lines of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë described the fate of the missionary St John Rivers in racial terms: 'Firm, faithful, and devoted; full of energy, and zeal, and truth, he labours for his race'.[44] St John's 'race', as he clearly expressed to Jane in the novel, comprises not an ethnic group or even the Anglo-Saxon group to which he belongs, but 'the ranks of [God's] chosen'.[45]

Even Disraeli's great enemy Gladstone portrayed race in a similar manner in his famous pamphlet decrying Disraeli's foreign policy in 1876, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East*. Referring to the Ottoman Turks who had lately committed brutal violence on their Bulgarian Christian subjects, Gladstone referred to the subjective qualities within their race which rendered the Turks dangerous.

> It is not a question of Mahometanism simply, but of Mahometanism compounded with the peculiar character of race. They are not the mild Mahometans of India, nor the chivalrous Saladins of Syria, nor the cultured Moors of Spain . . . Wherever they went, a broad line of blood marked the track behind them; and, as far as their dominion reached, civilisation disappeared from view. They represented everywhere government by force, as opposed to government by law.[46]

[42] *BDL*, vi, p. 263, Disraeli to Sarah Brydges Willyams, 29 Sept. 1853.
[43] *BDL*, vi, pp. 215-6, Disraeli to Sarah Brydges Willyams, 28 Feb. 1853.
[44] Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, (London, 1847; 2015), p. 651.
[45] *Ibid*., p. 577.
[46] W.E. Gladstone, *Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East* (London, 1876), p. 9.

Gladstone implied that there was something peculiar within the Mahometan race – not a physical characteristic, but a subjective type of personality – that contributed to its brutal style of government.

A similar idea occurred in the arguments sustained by the ethnologist James Cowles Prichard (1786-1858), to whom Disraeli referred Willyams in a letter in September of 1853. Prichard is a good example of the extent to which the project of racial 'science' was informed by a desire to vindicate biblical truths, and it is significant that Disraeli cited him as an influence. Prichard's ethnological project contained science in its methodology, but religion in its objectives. His *Researches into the Physical History of Man* (1813) wanted to show the truth of the account of creation described in Genesis: that mankind descended from a single human family.[47] In doing so, he moved away from the strictly physical notion of race and towards the study of similar language and culture groups as a more viable way of explaining a united human origin. These groups, which Prichard called interchangeably 'nations', 'races', and 'tribes', could be delineated less by their physical characteristics – such as the shape of their skulls – than by their cultural affinities.[48] Hence he could argue that all of mankind had originated from Adam and Eve and shared a single biblically-documented heritage, but had subsequently transformed into distinct nations based on different cultural, linguistic, and spiritual capacities. Prichard claimed, for example, that the three major religions of the world, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, arose from the Semitic race because of 'the peculiar intensity and abstraction of their conceptions of the divine'.[49] Prichard's research sparked surprisingly favourable critiques from orthodox Christian thinkers. The high-church publication *The Christian Remembrancer* cast suspicion on several of Prichard's claims, but ultimately commended 'the eminent author of the work before us' for 'hold[ing] fast the right

[47] H.F. Augstein, 'Prichard, James Cowles (1786–1848)', *ODNB* [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22776]. See also H. F. Augstein, 'Linguistics and politics in the early nineteenth-century: James Cowles Prichard's moral philology', *History of European Ideas* 23 (1997), pp. 1-18. For Prichard as monogenist who moved towards 'historical and comparative linguistics', see Kidd, pp. 132-3.
[48] James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Man,* ed. George W. Stocking Jr., (Chicago, 1973), pp. lxxi-lxxii.
[49] Prichard, *Researches*, vol. iv, pp. 549, 609-10, 612.

belief on this very vital subject', and for declaring '"that it pleased the Almighty Creator to make of one blood all nations of the earth, and that all mankind are the offspring of common parents"'.[50]

Prichard's suggestion that members of the Semitic race shared a mysterious and intense spiritual capacity accords with Disraeli's explanation of the Jews as distinguishable by their spiritual propensity rather than by a similarity of blood. In the letter that Disraeli wrote to Willyams in September 1853, he also referred to the young Elizabeth Sheppard's new novel *Charles Auchester* (1853), which Sheppard had dedicated to him. Disraeli wrote that Sheppard, though a Gentile, had understood and explained the mysteries of the Semitic race after reading Disraeli's novels:

> I have finished 'Ch:Auchester'. The principle of race wh: pervades it, forms another tie for us. The most curious thing is, the enthusiasm of the writer in that behalf is quite disinterested – she being a pure Gentile, & having imbibed the creed from the poor writings of yr. present correspondent. So, you see, seed fructifies. Did you ever read Dr. Prichard's Natural History of Man?'[51]

Sheppard's novel was told from the point of view of Charles Auchester, a character based on the Jewish composer Felix Mendelssohn. Auchester begins his tale by explaining that his mother 'inherited the right, to name herself of Hebrew origin', and therein 'my chief glory lies . . . I claim the golden link in my genealogy as that which connects it with Eternity, and with all that in my Faith is glorious'.[52] Within Sheppard's novel Auchester's Hebrew origin acts as an inherited spiritual gift that gives him greater sensitivity to the beauty of music. By the phrase 'seed fructifies', then, Disraeli meant something that could be intellectually and spiritually reproduced – the case between him and Sheppard – rather than biologically or genetically passed down. Such was the manner in which Disraeli and Mary Anne interacted

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[50] *The Christian Remembrancer: A Monthly Magazine and Review*, vol. vii (Jan. – June, London, 1844), p. 564.

[51] *BDL* vi, p. 258, Disraeli to Sarah Brydges Willyams, 15 Sep. 1853. Disraeli refers to Prichard's *The Natural History of Man*, published in 1843 as a revised popular version of *Physical History of Man*. See also Elizabeth Lee, 'Sheppard, Elizabeth Sara (1830–1862)', rev. Megan A. Stephan, *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/25341]. Ironically, Sheppard did have Jewish origins but Disraeli did not seem to be aware of them.

[52] Elizabeth Sara Sheppard, *Charles Auchester* (3 vols., London, 1853) i, p. 7. Also note that Mendelssohn is one of the Jewish musicians about whom Sidonia raves to Coningsby; see Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 221.

with the Jewish Rothschilds, with whom they a close friendship. In 1845, for example, Disraeli wrote to Baron Lionel de Rothschild to congratulate him on the birth of his son: 'The journals of to-day give us the interesting information of the birth of your son. I hope he will prove worthy of his pure and sacred race, and of his beautiful brothers and sisters'.[53] Mary Anne went even further with religious language, writing to Lady de Rothschild: 'My dear, that beautiful baby may be the future Messiah whom we are led to expect – who knows? And you will be the most favoured of women'.[54]

Even when Disraeli referred more specifically to 'scientific' classifications of race, his claims rooted themselves in a system of racial thought contained within a larger religious project. In August 1845, Disraeli wrote a letter to *The Morning Post* to defend his claim – via Sidonia in *Coningsby* – that 'the Jews were a Caucasian race'.[55] His argument could be vindicated, Disraeli argued, because 'the question of races is no longer settled by the dreams of erudition', but by the results of 'modern science'. Specifically, Disraeli claimed, 'Blumenbach, the Newton of physiology, has established a division which has received the sanction of all succeeding authorities', and in that system, the Jews could be located within the Caucasian category.[56] This 'Newton of physiology' was the German natural historian Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), whose study of race, like Prichard's, began from a biblical interpretation of human history. Peter Kitson has shown, for example, that Blumenbach first used the term 'Caucasian' in 1795 to describe his theory that 'after the Deluge, civilisation had begun again in Caucasus, where Noah's ark came to rest'.[57] As well as seeking to vindicate passages of scripture, Blumenbach attributed the development of human races specifically to the intelligent creativity of God. In *On the Natural Variety of*

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[53] *BDL*, iv, p. 201, Disraeli to Baron Lionel de Rothschild, 3 Dec. 1845.
[54] Constance Battersea, *Reminiscences* (London, 1922), p. 45.
[55] See Disraeli, *Coningsby,* p. 219.
[56] *BDL* iv, p. 268. This came from Blumenbach's *Contributions to Natural History, Part I,* (1790 first edition, 1806, second edition). See Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatises*, Thomas Benyshe, ed. trans. (London, 1865), pp. 302-4.
[57] Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (New York, 2007), p. 30. Cf. Kidd, *The Forging of Race*, p. 24; H.F. Augstein, 'From the land of the Bible to the Caucasus and beyond: the shifting ideas of the geographical origin of humankind', in W. Ernst and B. Harris (eds.), *Race, Science and Medicine* (London, 1999).

Mankind (1775), he wrote that he laid the question of how racial mutations took place, 'to the account of the great mutability of nature, and this great mutability itself to the active and wise determination of the Creator'.[58] Blumenbach's goal in explaining human variety, then, was to shed light on the nuanced physical and moral processes that God initiated in creation. This is illustrated by a memoir published in 1865, which ended with the eulogizing statement that Blumenbach had contributed 'the highest truth that natural history ever had proclaimed, *The Physical Unity*, and through the *physical unity* the *moral unity*, of the human race'.[59] Through the demonstration of physical likeness, Blumenbach, like Prichard after him, asserted the religious and moral likeness of all peoples through their common creation. Thus Blumenbach's 'classification of mankind' appeared, as his editor admitted in 1865, 'neither final nor rigidly scientific'.[60] The fact that Disraeli derived his own theory of racial categories from such a religiously-informed system demonstrates the extent to which religious paradigms pervaded the project of racial 'science', and hence Disraeli's own project, in this period.

Throughout the 1860s and 1870s, the language of race permeated the projects of Christian intellectuals and an intertwined conversation about racial and religious inheritance took shape. A significant example of this discourse, Charles Kingsley's *The Roman and the Teuton*, a lecture series delivered at Cambridge in 1864, comprised a significant meditation upon how God worked through peoples and nations.[61] His first lecture sought to explain the cause of the Teutonic race's victory over Rome. He ascribed its triumph to

> the strange and complicated education which God appointed for this race; and by which he has fitted it to become, at least for many centuries henceforth, the ruling race of the world . . . Races, like individuals, it has been often said, may have their childhood, their youth, their manhood, their old age, and natural death.[62]

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[58] Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatises*, Thomas Benyshe, ed. trans. (London, 1865), p. 290.
[59] *Ibid*., p. 63. For the imperative of the unity of the human race in Christian theology, see Kidd, *The Forging of Races*, pp. 24-9.
[60] Blumenbach, *The Anthropological Treatises*, p. ix.
[61] Norman Vance, 'Kingsley, Charles (1819–1875)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/15617].
[62] Charles Kingsley, *The Roman and the Teuton* (Cambridge, 1864), p. 16.

God's mysterious and indecipherable plan for races resembled, for Kingsley, God's plan for individuals. Disraeli – who conceived of religion not in the terms of intimate personal testimony, but macroscopically, as a majestic and sweeping scheme that moved empires and ages – similarly believed, in his own words, that 'God works through races'.[63] Just as the Israelite people found themselves called to follow a particular path, so had the Saxon race, for example, in the succeeding centuries. This notion that racial history acted as a subset of providential history could be found throughout the public rhetoric of the period. Archbishop Manning, writing a public pastoral letter in 1867 to decry Fenianism and the political radicalism that were becoming associated with Irish Catholicism, represented Catholics as part of this racial and religious history. Catholics should give thanks that 'the Providence of God' allowed that when 'the English tongue began to contradict the Catholic Church, the children of S. Patrick took it as if their own, and have spread the Catholic faith . . . wheresoever the Anglo-Saxon race and language have extended'.[64] Manning explained, however, that as history has unfolded, political power has centralized around Protestant kingdoms and governments:

> England, Scotland, and Ireland were once three kingdoms: they are now one indivisible realm. What God has consolidated by ages of time no human hand can dissolve. The onward march of Divine Providence has accomplished this fusion of races, in their higher and mightier unity. There is no returning upon the past. The wheat in the ear cannot go back into the stalk, nor the stalk into the blade. As the world moves onward, the Providence of God calls into existence new social orders: and out of the arise right, justice, and sovereignty.[65]

Manning articulated what had become a widespread view: that God's providence continued to shape succeeding racial and national dynasties, and that the unfolding of human history – racial, social, political – remained fixed within God's command.

Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) perhaps instantiated this co-mingling of race, moral inquiry, culture, and religion in the 1860s and 1870s. Arnold's work responded

[63] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 314.
[64] Hughenden MSS 135/3, fol 8, p. 123.
[65] *Ibid*.

to a well-established debate about the value of the Semitic race. Michael Ragussis has claimed that Disraeli's creation of the paradigmatic character of Sidonia in the 1840s formed the discursive basis from which Arnold developed his own thoughts on Hebraism in 1869, and from which Anthony Trollope and George Eliot conducted their respective inquiries into the question of the Jewish race in the 1870s.[66] Arnold's racial and cultural theory, like Disraeli's, responded to a malaise concerning the moral decline that he identified in English thought. He argued that the characteristics of two particular racial groups – Hellenes and Hebrews – needed bringing into balance in order for England to rediscover its moral harmony. Like Prichard, Kingsley, and Disraeli, Arnold believed in spiritual and moral differences between races. 'The governing idea of Hellenism is spontaneity of consciousness', he explained, while 'that of Hebraism, strictures of consciousness'.[67] For Arnold, England's lapse into functionalism – an issue that Disraeli, Carlyle, and others also classified as a moral emergency – followed from its overdeveloped Hebraism, which had caused a descent into the 'overvaluing of the practical' and 'moral complacency'.[68]

Disraeli made one of his most significant contributions to the debate over the racial and religious worthiness of Aryans and Semites in *Lothair*, which contained a significant intellectual response to Arnold. For now, it is important to understand that Disraeli intricately participated in this public intellectual conversation about the way God's races contributed to the unfolding of history: both physically and spiritually. As we have seen, historians tend to embed Disraeli's racial claims into a larger narrative of Disraeli as a shrewd proto-modernist, who used the harsh language of racial superiority to exonerate his own position. Yet Stefan Collini's words about a significant aspect of Arnold's intellectual project – that he sought 'to salvage what was of value in Christianity within the general decline of belief in biblical literalism and supernatural theology' – could equally apply to Disraeli.[69] Shifts in science and

[66] See Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: The Jewish Question & English National Identity* (North Carolina, 1995), pp. 211-33.
[67] Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. Jane Garnett (1869; Oxford, 2006) p. 138.
[68] Stefan Collini, 'Arnold, Matthew (1822–1888)', *ODNB* [http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2167/view/article/679].
[69] *Ibid*.

anthropology ensured that for Arnold, Disraeli, Kingsley, Coleridge, and many others, the lexicon and conception of race formed a crucial vocabulary for articulating this response to a shifting moral and religious society. [70]

But in Disraeli's mind, as in the minds of many ethnologists and commentators, this racial story within history remained inextricable from, and indeed functioned as a species of, a larger providential scheme: an overriding religious metanarrative. As Peter Mandler has phrased it, in this period, the 'existing civilizational perspectives, deeply rooted in English Protestant and Enlightenment modes of thought, were perfectly serviceable for most imperial and national purposes'.[71] This resulted in race joining these already strong currents of ideological and cultural discourse, but not replacing them. What sounds to the ears of twentieth- and twenty-first-century historians as Disraeli's obsession with an ultimately dangerous racial and genetic vocabulary in these debates between 'Aryan' and 'Semite' re-emerges in context as a dialect used to raise moral and religious questions.

[70] See Peter J. Kitson, *Romantic Literature, Race, and Colonial Encounter* (New York, 2007), p. 44: Coleridge's racial ideas, for example, were determined by, in Kitson's words, 'his belief in a Judaeo-Christian pattern of fall and redemption that would allow the "Historic" race to reunite the present diversity of mankind, as Christ redeemed the individual'.
[71] Mandler, *The English National Character*, p. 72.

III.

'Favoured by Nature and by Nature's God': Disraeli's racial and religious claims[72]

The wider penchant of nineteenth-century racial and religious thinkers to use race as essentially a religious category – designed and ordained by God – occupies centre ground in framing the intellectual and religious environment in which Disraeli made his own racial assertions. This final section illuminates this same cohesion of race and religion in Disraeli's written work. It focuses especially on claims made as evidence that Disraeli's fixation on the Jews had a racial origin and that he believed the explanation of history lay in race, rather than religion. While Disraeli certainly extolled the superior racial qualities of the Jews, historians have overstated the extent to which this was a purely self-vindicating exercise, as well as the degree to which it obviated religious commitment. As we have seen, Disraeli believed that Jews were special, and that he was special, because they possessed a particular set of moral and religious principles that England lacked from the 1840s to the 1870s. Through the character of Sidonia in the 1840s Disraeli visualized that the racial and religious exceptionality of the Jews – their 'spiritual genes' – could be adopted by the English. When he argued that Jews and Englishmen belonged to the same racial group, Disraeli did merely refer to Blumenbach's definition of 'Caucasian'. He made a claim within a conversation about England's inheritance: that the Jews and the English had the status of chosen peoples. Here the argument moves through Disraeli's fiction and non-fiction chronologically, focusing on *Coningsby* (1844), *Tancred* (1847), *Lord George Bentinck* (1852), the 'General Preface' to *Lothair* (1870), and *Lothair* itself. When considered closely, the racial discourse within each of these texts demonstrates that Disraeli's notion of a grand progression of racial history remained firmly fixed within a religious metanarrative, with God as creator, by whom nations were chosen and guided. As he claimed in the General Preface of 1870, 'the Divine government

[72] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 221.

of this world' had 'ordained that the sacred purposes should be effected by the instrumentality of various human races'.[73]

In addition to the larger intellectual context of racial science in nineteenth-century Britain, and the manner in which it was entangled with religious debates and the decline of scriptural authority, Disraeli's writing joined a wider literary discourse on the figure of 'the Jew'. The category of 'the Jew' acted as an indeterminate racial identity – a kind of blank canvas – onto which English writers projected their own cultural ideas and anxieties. Jews could be represented, in Cheyette's words, as '*both* the embodiment of liberal progress *and* as one of the vestiges of an outdated medievalism; as a bastion of empire *and* one of the main threats to empire'.[74] Heidi Kaufman has demonstrated that in the mid-nineteenth century, the project of English national-identity building called expressly upon Jewish history and culture, as well as the Old Testament. Disraeli did not stand alone in attempting to articulate the Christian nation's origins within Judaism; like many of Kaufman's examples, he attempted to show that Israel's racial and religious inheritance could be shared with and reimagined in Christian England.[75]

This racial and religious negotiation between Israel and England met with its share of antagonists, and indeed, historians have paid especial attention to the anti-Semitic slurs that Disraeli suffered during his early campaigns, and the racial stigmatization he remained victim to well into the 1870s.[76] Particularly famous is the paper war between Disraeli and Daniel O'Connell – the Roman Catholic who was elected MP for Dublin in 1832 – on the subject of Disraeli's Jewishness. O'Connell's infamous slandering of Disraeli's race shows the extent to which racial and religious attitudes were blurred in this period. To give virulence to his

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[73] Disraeli, 'General Preface' in *Lothair*, p. xvi.
[74] Cheyette, *Constructions of 'The Jew' in English Literature and Society*, pp. 9-10. See also H. L. Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, 1996), pp. 4-5.
[75] Heidi Kaufman, *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel: Reflections on a Nested Nation* (Pennsylvania, 2009), pp. 4-5. Kaufman argues, 'racial ideologies in the nineteenth century were inseparable from religious history because they so often evoked Christianity's affiliation with Judaism'.
[76] See Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, pp. 323-86 and Miloš Ković, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford, 2010).

argument against Disraeli's ethnic origins, O'Connell traced his lineage back to the the myth that Jews were to blame for the execution of Jesus.

> His name shews that he is of Jewish origin. I do not use it as a term of reproach; there are many most respectable Jews. But there are, as in every other people, some of the lowest and most disgusting grade of moral turpitude; and of those I look upon Mr. DISRAELI as the worst. He has just the qualities of the impenitent thief on the Cross, and I verily believe, if Mr. DISRAELI'S family herald were to be examined, and his genealogy traced, the same personage would be discovered to be the heir at law of the exalted individual to whom I allude. I forgive Mr. DISRAELI now, and as the lineal descendant of the blasphemous robber, who ended his career beside the Founder of the Christian Faith, I leave the Gentleman to the enjoyment of his infamous distinction and family honours.[77]

Jews' identity remained inextricable from their association with those who had never accepted Christ as Messiah. This found expression in the foundation of the *Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews*. Disraeli anticipated this conflation of his racial and religious identity; indeed, he combatted it in nearly all of his novels and took especial pains in Chapter 24 of *Lord George Bentinck* to show the inaccuracy of the idea that Jews should be punished for killing Jesus Christ. He petitioned his readers to consider how Christian salvation would have been manifested if Christ were not killed on the cross for the saving of sins.[78] In his narrative, the Jews were an integral part of God's plan for Christ's redemption of humanity. Disraeli considered himself and the Jews among the elite races in England. He wrote to Lord Salisbury in 1875 to say that 'Nothing is more disgusting, than the habit of our officers speaking always of the inhabitants of India – many of them descended from the great races – as "niggers". It is ignorant, & brutal, – & surely most mischievous'.[79]

We have already seen in *Alroy* the extent to which Disraeli used Old Testament narratives to re-visit Jewish history and to provide a glorified illustration of a religiously and politically cohesive nation to combat views such as O'Connell's. As we shall see, this exploration continued in the Young England novels, with the character of Sidonia becoming

[77] *BDL*, ii, p. 41, Disraeli to The Electors of Taunton, 12 May 1835.
[78] *Lord George Bentinck: a political biography* (London, 1905).
[79] Qtd. in Michael Bentley, *Lord Salisbury's World: Conservative Environments in Late-Victorian Britain* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 224.

the main ambassador for modern Jews, who have, Sidonia argues, inherited the spiritual excellence of the biblical Israelites through their race. Historians have largely labelled Sidonia as Disraeli's mechanism for overcoming his Jewishness. Robert O'Kell calls Sidonia, for example, 'the projected ideal of [Disraeli's] other, alienated self'.[80] But it remains important to consider the ways in which Sidonia operated on more than just a psychological level for Disraeli. He also represented Disraeli's ideological and intellectual response to the racial and religious debates that we have considered above. One of the aims of this section consists in illustrating the extent to which Disraeli called upon biblical narratives and religious language in formulating Sidonia's monologues about the Jews' racial excellence.

Disraeli also wrote within an extended period of imperial and colonial unease in British history. As H.L. Malchow has shown, the literary genre of the gothic was the result of imperial anxiety, along with a particular 'fear of contamination . . . [and] the threatened destruction of the simple and pure by the poisonously exotic, by anarchic forces of passion and appetite'.[81] This meant that the nineteenth-century novel took on a particular position as, in Heidi Kaufman's words, 'one visible place where English identity imagined – against all logic – to be racially pure'.[82] Disraeli saw his career in politics as centrally involved with this very threat of destruction and pursuit of purity in politics, race, and religion. As Jonathan Parry has demonstrated, Disraeli imagined himself 'fighting what was essentially an ideological war . . . His title to fame would be his genius in combatting destructive *ideas*, cosmopolitan ideas that would rot the cohesion and greatness of the country'.[83] What he said about the religious excellence of Jews, manifested in their race, informed his articulation of a healthy English national character. In crafting the character of Sidonia in the 1840s, then, Disraeli redefined and renegotiated 'the Jew' or the 'Hebrew' within a wider conversation about race and the moral inheritance of the English nation. His construction of the Jew embodied the ideal amalgam of the Jewish religious imagination and the English statesman: racially and

[80] O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics*, p. 217.
[81] Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, pp. 4-5.
[82] Kaufman, *English Origins, Jewish Discourse*, p. 195.
[83] J.P. Parry, 'Disraeli and England', *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), pp. 704-5.

religiously composed of the old and new Jerusalem. Sidonia articulates the supremacy of the Jews not because they are biologically superior, but largely because they have a unified and exceptional set of religious principles, grounded in biblical narratives of deliverance, embedded in their 'race'. In Disraeli's view, the Jews' religious principles, and moreover, their position as part of a continuing narrative of deliverance, ministered to the ailing condition of England desperately required from the 1840s, through to the 1860s and 1870s.

The character of Sidonia first appeared in *Coningsby* (1844), in a scene which problematizes the singular 'All is race' theory and showcases the extent to which Sidonia, in both his identity as a Jew and in his intellectual instructions to Coningsby, embodied a religious figure. Sidonia enters the novel to guide Coningsby's moral and spiritual direction, rather than educate him about the physiological facts of race. His introduction to the novel occurs when Coningsby has just left Eton, having distinguished himself as a promising and inspirational leader among his contemporaries: 'his had been the inspiring mind that had guided their opinions . . . directed the bent and tenor of their lives and thoughts'.[84] He knows that he will develop his intellectual maturity through 'books, and action, and deep thought', but 'for the heart, where was he to find solace?' Coningsby searches for, if not explicitly a religious figure, at least someone who will guide his moral character and his passions, rather than refine his intellect. No sooner has he asked himself this question, as he reclines in an ancient forest during his summer travels, than the heavens literally respond: 'he observed that the azure sky had vanished, a thin white film had suddenly spread itself over the heavens'.[85] He runs to the nearest inn for shelter, and as he stands in his window looking out at the storm, 'a flash of lightning illuminated the whole country, and a horseman at full speed . . . galloped up to the door'.[86] In the next few moments, 'the stranger', whose anonymity reinforces his role as spiritual orator, enters Coningsby's room.

[84] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 99.
[85] *Ibid*.
[86] *Ibid*., p. 100.

This scene, like the appearance of Sybil in the subsequent novel – in which light pours through a church window, 'just touching the head of the unknown with a kind of halo' – suggests that Sidonia's role in *Coningsby*, like Sybil's in the following novel, will approximate that of a mysterious prophet, rather than an intellectual or scientific authority.[87] Sidonia delivers his maxims on race not within a political or intellectual conversation with Coningsby, but within an ongoing oracular narrative, in which he offers Coningsby bizarre and enigmatic epigrams: 'Every moment is travel, if understood' or 'Adventures are to the adventurous'.[88] Coningsby interprets Sidonia's temperament as strange and spiritual: he 'had never met or read of any one like this . . . His sentences were so short, his language so racy, his voice rang so clear, his elocution was so complete'.[89]

This notion of Sidonia as a mysterious prophet has found some acknowledgment in secondary literature. Michael Flavin has emphasized that Sidonia's 'creed of race' has a conspicuous 'absence of factual data or statistical support' and is most effectively argued when it is 'phras[ed] as a spiritual truth'.[90] But the secondary literature neglects Sidonia's reliance upon religious language and imagery in his presentation of race and Jewish superiority to Coningsby. Sidonia does not act merely as an anonymous wisdom character, or an esoteric mystic; he also makes it immediately known to Coningsby that he is a Jew. He compares the cleanliness of the inn where he sits with Coningsby, to the East, in which 'Moses and Mahomet made cleanliness religion'.[91] His claims of Eastern religious origin become more specific when Sidonia refuses the bacon and eggs that are offered him to eat, explaining, '"it is one of my bread days"' and 'cut[ting] from the large loaf a supply of crusts'.[92] In a statement that connotes the Jewish ritual observance of the Sabbath, the bread and wine of the Christian Eucharist, as well as Greek and Roman mythology, Sidonia claims to loves bread and wine because '"they are our chief and our oldest luxuries . . . Man has deified corn and wine!"'

[87] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 232.
[88] *Idem*., *Coningsby*, p. 101.
[89] *Ibid*., p. 103.
[90] Michael Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse* (Sussex, 2005), p. 124.
[91] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 102.
[92] *Ibid*., p. 102.

Coningsby responds to this, 'But Ceres without Bacchus . . . how does that do? Think you, under this roof, we could invoke the god?' and Sidonia replies, 'Let us swear by his body that we will try'.[93] In this reference to Ceres, the ancient Italian goddess of corn, and Bacchus, the god of wine in Greek and Roman mythology, Sidonia makes himself exceptional to Coningsby not only for his eccentricity as an Eastern figure, but for his observance of religious and mythological tradition. But at the heart of his conversation with Sidonia is the latter's refusal to eat pork, especially on a Sabbath day, and further, the imagery of the Eucharist, which is reinforced by Sidonia's comment about 'his body'.

In Sidonia's lecture to Coningsby on the manner in which the Jews are extraordinary, moreover, he explains essentially religious phenomena – the providential decree that the Jews should defeat their enemies in the Old Testament, for example – in racial language. To support his claim that the Jews are factually, physiologically exceptional, Sidonia cites well-known evidence of biblical triumph. Referring to the exclusion of Jews from Oxford and Cambridge, he asks Coningsby:

> Do you think that the quiet humdrum persecution of a decorous representative of an English university can crush those who have successfully baffled the Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzar, Rome, and the feudal ages? The fact is, you cannot destroy a pure race of the Caucasian organisation. It is a physiological fact; a simple law of nature, which has baffled Egyptian and Assyrian Kings, Roman Emperors, and Christian Inquisitors. No penal laws, no physical tortures, can effect that a superior race should be absorbed in an inferior, or be destroyed by it. The mixed persecuting races disappear; the pure persecuted race remains.[94]

In this passage Sidonia refers to the victory over the Egyptian pharaohs and subsequent exodus from Egypt: an exodus achieved primarily through God's intervention in delivering Moses and the Israelites.[95] He also instances the Jews' defeat of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, a scenario in which the prophet Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream

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[93] *Ibid*.
[94] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 219.
[95] See Exodus 2-12. God's intervention is entirely instrumental in Israelite's defeat of the Egyptians. God is crucial in saving Moses from the Pharoah's decree that no Hebrew children should live, educating him in the Pharaoh's court, delivering him safely to Midian after he kills an Egyptian, appearing to him in a burning bush and commanding him to return to Egypt to deliver the Israelites, sending ten plagues upon the Egyptians so that Pharaoh finally releases the Egyptians, and then finally, parting the waters of the Red Sea for Moses to lead his people to Mount Sinai.

to predict the downfall of the Babylonian kingdom, because 'the God of heaven [shall] set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever'.[96] The language of Daniel's prophecy echoes the language that Sidonia uses to assert the racial superiority of the Jews. Daniel claims that God's kingdom 'shall never be destroyed'; Sidonia claims that a superior race should never 'be absorbed in an inferior [race], or be *destroyed* by it'. Daniel claims that God's 'kingdom shall consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever'; Sidonia maintains that 'The mixed persecuting races disappear; the pure persecuted race remains'. Throughout this passage, Sidonia explicitly conflates racial excellence with a well-known narrative of religious-chosenness – indeed, in language remarkably similar to Daniel's – in which God intervenes on behalf of the chosen Israelites. These allusions to the books of Exodus and Daniel did not appear randomly. As we saw in an earlier chapter, Disraeli knew Exodus and Daniel: he had studied and inflected the story of Moses' deliverance in *Alroy*. It becomes increasingly clear, then, that Sidonia's racial theories intertwined with biblical accounts of the Jews' salvation.

Disraeli used the same language to appeal to Nathaniel, 1st Lord Rothschild about the increasingly ominous persecution of Jews and 'progroms' throughout Eastern Europe in 1880. His letter is striking both because Disraeli replicates Sidonia's arguments, and also because he clearly identifies with Rothschild as a fellow Jew:

> Dearest Nattie
> What does Bleichroder say about the Jewish persecution? or is he, and his prosperity, one of the causes of it? We have beaten the Pharoahs, the Assyrians and the Romans – and even the Middle Ages – and I have no fear they will ever extirpate us – but I foresee the chance of much misery, and perhaps devastation.[97]

Thus in his identification with the Jewish race, Disraeli adopted not just its ethnic and familial heritage, but its biblical history of exile and the ongoing cycles of persecution that continued into the narrative of modern history.

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[96] Daniel 2:44. See Chapter 2 for Disraeli's use of the Daniel dream interpretation sequence in *Alroy*.
[97] RAL 000/848/37/1 (ii), Disraeli to Nathaniel, 1st Lord Rothschild, 21 Nov. 1880.

Sidonia regards racial history as an important constituent within a larger divine plan for humanity, with God at the head. When he tells Coningsby, 'You must study physiology, my dear child. Pure races of Caucasus may be persecuted, but they cannot be despised', he goes on to suggest to Coningsby that he should 'thank [his] Creator' that he also descends from Caucasus.[98] To prove to Coningsby that the Hebrew race is exceptional, he explains that because the Hebrews are 'Favoured by Nature and by Nature's God, we produced the lyre of David, we gave you Isaiah and Ezekiel'.[99] He returns to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible as exemplars of Hebrew worthiness, demonstrating that his notion of racial excellence implied a capacity for spiritual and religious insight.

In *Tancred*, the final novel of the Young England trilogy published three years after *Coningsby*, Sidonia's ostensible lesson in physiology – what Vincent has termed Disraeli's 'racial doctrine' – similarly winds around religious doctrine.[100] Tancred's inquiry, to an even greater extent than Coningsby's, is made to appear as a spiritual deficit, one only filled by a return to biblical and theological tradition. The racial discourse in the novel, espoused by Sidonia and also enacted within Tancred's journey to the Holy Land, confirms this project of religious restoration. Early in the novel Tancred claims to his parents that he wants to travel to the Holy Sepulchre, and his monologue references the specific language of the creation story of Genesis 1:4, when God 'divided the light from the darkness'; it also recalls the theological affirmations of Christ's life as laid out in the Apostles' and Nicene creeds. He says to his father:

> When I remember that the Creator, since light sprang out of darkness, has deigned to reveal Himself to His creatures only in one land; that in that land He assumed a manly form, and met a human death; I feel persuaded that the country sanctified by such intercourse and such events must be endowed with marvellous and peculiar qualities.[101]

When Tancred's parents, their incompetent bishop, as well as Tancred's cousin, Lord Eskdale, each fail to understand Tancred's spiritual desires, he seeks Sidonia's wisdom. This wisdom

[98] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 221.
[99] *Ibid*., p. 221.
[100] Vincent, *Disraeli*, p. 27.
[101] Disraeli, *Tancred* p. 55.

amounted to more than a 'creed of race'; it included striking biblical and religious ideas.[102] Sidonia never mentions race without an accompanying explanation of the religious phenomena that make certain races favourable. For example, when Tancred tells Sidonia that he wants to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, because he believes that the Church of England, which 'should be under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit', has begun to languish, Sidonia's first response acknowledges Jerusalem's exceptional access to divine inspiration through the Hebrew race.[103] Sidonia explains that the children of Israel embodied the doctrines of both Judaism and Christianity:

> 'I believe that God spoke to Moses on Mount Horeb, and you believe that he was crucified in the person of Jesus on Mount Calvary. Both were, at least carnally, children of Israel: they spoke Hebrew to the Hebrews. The prophets were only Hebrews, the apostles were only Hebrews . . . the church of Rome . . . which converted this island to the faith of Moses and of Christ . . . was also founded by a native Hebrew'.[104]

Thus when, several chapters later, Sidonia proclaims '"All is race; there is no other truth"', and Lord Henry qualifies that this is so because race 'includes all other' truths, we can see that in the nineteenth-century contexts in which Disraeli wrote, and certainly in the mind of Disraeli and his character Sidonia, biblical narratives were an integral part of such an all-containing truth. Moreover, at the head of that expansive truth was, as Sidonia specifies, 'Nature's God'.[105]

In one of the most striking exemplars of the race discourse in *Tancred*, Disraeli introduces the characters of the Mesdemoiselles de Laurella, the daughters of 'a wealthy Hebrew merchant at Damascus'.[106] The Laurella daughters are examples of Jews conditioned by their society to be 'ashamed of their race, and not fanatically devoted to their religion, which might be true, but certainly not fashionable'.[107] In this sense, the Laurellas represent those who, in Disraeli's view, misunderstood the extraordinary religious and racial status

[102] See Flavin, *Benjamin Disraeli: The Novel as Political Discourse*, p. 124.
[103] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 122.
[104] *Ibid*.
[105] Disraeli, *Coningsby*, p. 221.
[106] *Idem*., *Tancred*, p. 393.
[107] *Ibid*., p. 394.

attached to God's chosen people. Sophonisbe Laurella, for example, hoped that the Jews, if well-mannered, 'might be able to pass through society without being discovered'.[108] The narrator remarks, with sarcasm, 'Consummation of the destiny of the favourite people of the Creator of the universe!'[109]

In order for Disraeli to portray a sharp contrast, the Laurellas visit Eva, the embodiment of Jewish righteousness in the novel, and her family, who are 'the main strength and ornament of their race and religion'. They arrive during what Eva explains as, 'one of our great national festivals . . . the celebration of the Hebrew vintage, the Feast of Tabernacles'.[110] Disraeli's narrator educates the reader, the Laurellas, and Tancred on the meaning of the Hebrew race through a detailed account of the Feast of Tabernacles. The narrator focuses on the promise and persistence of God's law and moreover, God's continued contract with the people of Israel, despite the degradation of the Jews throughout Europe. He confirms the promise of God to the *race* of Israel, explaining, 'The vineyards of Israel have ceased to exist, but the eternal law enjoins the children of Israel still to celebrate the vintage. A race that persists in celebrating their vintage, although they have no fruits to gather, will regain their vineyards'.[111]

So ready to dismiss Disraeli's religious interests are the historians who have written on this passage, that the dominant reading of it has become, as Endelman put it,

> In his tribute to Sukkot and its ancient customs . . . Disraeli ignored the historical, redemptive dimension of the holiday, its commemoration of the period after the exodus from Egypt during which the Israelites dwelled in temporary booths, and instead concentrated on its agricultural aspect, especially the harvesting of grapes and making of wine, a theme that is absent in Jewish tradition. What attracted him were not religious ideas associated with the holiday but its potential for being given a national or racial twist.[112]

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[108] *Ibid.*, p. 395.
[109] *Ibid.*
[110] *Ibid.*, p. 400.
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] Todd Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end"' Jewishness' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851*, pp. 123-125.

This reading ignores the fact that in his passage on the Sukkot, Disraeli references Leviticus 26, in which God affirms his promise to Israel by reminding the people of their deliverance from Egypt and claiming that He will continue to deliver them and give them sustenance.

> If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.[113]

In Disraeli's explanation of the Hebrew vintage he uses the same themes of persistent sustenance in the face of exile and degradation. In accordance with the theme of exile and estrangement in Leviticus, Disraeli imagines, for the sake of argument, a 'child of Israel in the dingy suburb or the squalid quarter of some bleak northern town'.[114] He uses the unfortunate child of Israel to exemplify the promise of Hebrew deliverance: the Jews have a future encoded in their race.

To demonstrate that the religious promises of the Hebrew race have a place in Christian Europe, Disraeli then connects the Levitican promise to Israel in the Old Testament with the life of Jesus in the New Testament. He imagines that the poor Hebrew's 'mercantile connections will enable him, often at considerable cost, to procure some palm leaves from Canaan, which he may wave in his synagogue while he exclaims, as the crowd did when the Divine descendant of David entered Jerusalem, "Hosannah in the highest"'.[115] In the final passage of Disraeli's vignette, he places the lowly European Jew in the place of practising the Kiddush, the precursor, as he explains, to the Christian Eucharist. He uses the Eucharistic imagery to revisit the Jews' thanksgiving continuous cycle of Hebrew redemption:

> Perhaps, as he is giving the Keedush, the Hebrew blessing to the Hebrew meal, breaking and distributing the bread, and sanctifying, with a preliminary prayer, the goblet of wine he holds, the very ceremony which the Divine Prince of Israel, nearly two thousand years ago, adopted at the most memorable of all repasts, and eternally invested with eucharistic grace or, perhaps, as he is offering up the peculiar thanksgiving of the Feast of Tabernacles, praising Jehovah for the vintage which his children may no longer

[113] See Leviticus 26: 3-5.
[114] Disraeli, *Tancred*, p. 401.
[115] *Ibid*.

> cull, but also for his promise that they may some day again enjoy it, and his wife and his children are joining in a pious Hosanna, that is, Save us! A party of Anglo-Saxons, very respectable men, ten-pounders, a little elevated it may be, though certainly not in the honour of the vintage, pass the house, and words like these are heard:
> . . . 'Oh! it's those cursed Jews! . . . It is one of their horrible feasts. [116]

The passage ends with Disraeli imagining members of the Anglo-Saxon race scorning the Jews in the midst of their worship; worship that, as Disraeli has demonstrated, is both affirmed and vindicated by God's promise that the children of Israel will cull their vintage again, and by its inextricable connection to the Eucharist, the commemoration of Christ's gift of salvation. These religious promises, says Disraeli, glorify the Jewish race and ensure that it is exceptional. When we read Disraeli's words with a theological awareness, explanations like Endelman's – that Disraeli merely aimed to portray a 'national or racial twist' – utterly break down. Even if he used racial language, his conception of the racial and religious inheritance of the Jews was so intwined, that his language is saturated with biblical allusion.

In Chapter 24 of *Lord George Bentinck* (1852) Disraeli argued that it was precisely these religious promises, demonstrated through the Jews' religious festivals, that had been lost in the Middle Ages, which resulted in the persecution and banishment of the Jews. Their witness to the gospel, and the beauty of the Jews' religious practice – the Hebrew's 'ceremonies, his customs, and his festivals are still to celebrate the bounty of nature and the favour of Jehovah' – had been lost, argued Disraeli, in the 'prejudices and persecutions which originated in barbarous or mediaeval superstitions'.[117] The oppression of the Jews in the medieval period had been injurious to modern European society, Disraeli claimed, because it cut it off from the holy origins of creation. In a passage sometimes used to represent the notion of Disraeli's Jewish racial superiority, Disraeli actually claimed that the Jewish race comprised a vehicle for God's first promises to His people:

> The Jewish race connects the modern populations with the early ages of the world, when the relations of the Creator with the created were more intimate than in these days, when angels visited the earth, and God himself even spoke with man. The Jews represent

[116] *Ibid.*, p. 402.
[117] Disraeli, *Lord George Bentinck: a political biography* (1852; London, 1905), pp. 319-20.

> the Semitic principle: all that is spiritual in our nature. They are the trustees of tradition, and the conservators of the religious element.[118]

The Jewish race maintained its sanctity largely because of the fundamental Jewishness of all subsequent theology. This led Disraeli to his conclusion that the glory of Christianity, through the figure of Jesus Christ, derived from its exemplification of Jewish truth. In the final line of the chapter, Disraeli cited not Blumenbach or Prichard to vindicate the excellence of the Jewish race, but claimed instead: 'These may be dreams, but there is one fact which none can contest. Christians may continue to persecute Jews and Jews may persist in disbelieving Christians, but who can deny that Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of the Most High God, is the eternal glory of the Jewish race?'[119]

If any doubt persisted that Disraeli's theory of race involved a broader religious project after he published the strange chapter in *Lord George Bentinck*, he took pains to remove it. The classical scholar William Cookesley wrote to Disraeli in January 1853 – the same year that Disraeli referred Sarah Brydges Willyams to Prichard's theories of race – to express concern over the wisdom of Disraeli's Chapter 24 and urged him to stand centrally in church politics, rather than associating himself too strongly with high-church groups. In his response to Cookesley, Disraeli announced his primary allegiance to the Jewish institution that he regarded as the core of the Church's inheritance. The Church supplied, in Disraeli's words, 'the visible means which embalms the memory of my race, their deeds and thoughts, and connects their blood with the origin of things'.[120]

Todd Endelman's response to this claim from Disraeli is memorable: 'Hardly a stirring confession of faith!'.[121] Whether or not Disraeli 'confessed faith' in this passage seems not only immaterial on account of its inaccessibility, but less interesting than the intellectual forces at work in Disraeli's statement. The fact that he understood the Church of England to act as 'the

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[118] *Ibid.*, p. 323.
[119] *Ibid.*, p. 330.
[120] *BDL*, viii, p. 400, Disraeli to William Cookesley, 13 Jan. 1852.
[121] Todd Endelman, '"A Hebrew to the end"' in Richmond and Smith (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli, 1818-1851*, p. 127.

repository of divine truth' and the embalmer of God's promise to the children of Israel – the Jewish race – suggests that it is impossible to understand Disraeli's racial discourse without situating it within other narratives: not only his intellectual context in Victorian Britain, but also his own persistent conception of divine order.[122] Disraeli continued his letter to Cookesley by explaining that the present state of religious *angst* in Britain was the manifestation of an ongoing racial and religious progression through history. Just as Disraeli had conceived of the narrative of the biblical king in *Alroy*, so he framed races under the control of a providential plan and even a biblical cycle. He wrote to Cookesley:

> There are few great things left, and the Church is one. No doubt its position at this moment is critical, and, indeed, the whole religious sentiment of the country is in a convulsive state; but I believe the state of affairs is only one of the periodical revolts of the Northern races against Semitic truth, influenced mainly by mortified vanity in never having been the medium of direct communication with the Almighty; and that it will end as in previous instances, after much sorrow and suffering, in their utter discomfiture.

Anglo-Saxon humiliation of Jews – such as the vignette in *Tancred* in which the respectable 'ten-pounders' mock the lowly Hebrew in his worship – exemplified the age-old suffering of the Israelite people because of their exceptionalism, and the malicious envy that it incited in their enemies.

In *Lothair* (1870), Disraeli solidified this understanding of the Jewish race as spiritually and scripturally bound to God's redemptive plan. In response to Matthew Arnold's understanding of the Hebrews and Hellenes in *Culture and Anarchy*, published the year before, Disraeli produced what Michael Ragussis has aptly called a 'critique of the extremes of Hellenism, since what Arnold had done was to critique the extremes of Hebraism'.[123] Ragussis does not discuss, however, Disraeli's critique of Hellenism as a larger religious notion; as Disraeli claims in *Lothair*, 'God works through races'. Through the character of Gaston Phoebus, Disraeli illustrated the dangers of a strictly physiological understanding of race, which did not appreciate the spiritual qualities that distinguished races from one

[122] See Clyde J. Lewis, 'Disraeli's Conception of Divine Order', *Jewish Social Studies*, 24 (1962), pp. 144-61.
[123] Michael Ragussis, *Figures of Conversion: 'The Jewish Question' & English National Identity*, p. 225.

another. As we have seen, Mr Phoebus, the artist friend of Theodora Campion in the novel, was based on the Victorian painter and sculptor, Frederic Leighton. Leighton's art, which had been controversial and polarizing during his lifetime, anticipated the deconstructive philosophy of modernism; he resisted creating a narrative through illustration, and instead depicted sensual human bodies as the sites of erotic tension and potential chaos. Drawing extensively on the classical world in his exploration of human sexuality, 'in his self-portrait, Leighton [chose] to identify himself unmistakably as a Hellenist'.[124]

In his representation of Mr Phoebus, Disraeli took what he saw as an inward-looking, hedonistic fixation with bodies to its extreme. Phoebus' epicurean philosophy has no part in Judeo-Christian morality: he insists that 'the essence of education is the education of the body'.[125] In Phoebus' system, religious values restrict bodily and sexual exploration. He deplores what he sees as the values that have been upheld by the Semitic race: 'Semitism has destroyed art; it taught man to despise his own body, and the essence of art is to honour the human frame'.[126] In Disraeli's mind, this indulgent self-worship – what Marx called 'the religion of sensuous desire' – could be connected to the dangerous forces of modernity that threatened the English nation.[127] As Disraeli had stated in his Preface to the novel, these forces urged England to 'surrender to a sensual pagan "luxury and self-indulgence"'.[128]

Through Phoebus, then, Disraeli constructed an example of the dangers of secular or material racial thought. He juxtaposed the hedonism of the Hellenic and unprincipled Phoebus with the wisdom, creativity, and most importantly, the soteriological assurance enjoyed by the Semitic race. In Lothair's travels, he confronts Phoebus in Greece where Phoebus extolls the purity of the 'unmixed race': '"Welcome to an Aryan clime, an Aryan landscape, and an Aryan race"'.[129] This is soon eclipsed when Lothair travels to the Holy Land.

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[124] Rosemary Barrow, 'Drapery, Sculpture and the Praxitelean Ideal' in Tim Barringer and Elizabeth Prettejohn (eds.), *Frederic Leighton: Antiquity, Renaissance, Modernity* (New Haven, 1999), p. 50.
[125] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 106.
[126] *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.
[127] See Barringer, 'Leighton in Albertopolis: Monumental Art and Objects of Desire' in *Frederic Leighton* (1999), p. 159. Barringer applies Marx's comment to Leighton's painting.
[128] Qtd. in Parry, 'Disraeli and England', p. 713.
[129] Disraeli, *Lothair*, p. 297.

On the Mount of Olives, he meets Paraclete, the mysterious Syrian gentleman whose name means 'Holy Spirit'. The role of Paraclete is to re-connect Phoebus' racial theory to its rightful origins in Judaism and Christianity. Paraclete overrides Phoebus' humanist racialism by instructing Lothair that God ordained Semites and Aryans to follow specific paths. In his conversation with Lothair, Paraclete alludes to John 14:2, a biblical passage that appears in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer on 3 May, the feast day of Philip and James, and thus would be well known to his readers:

> 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' and by the various families of nations the designs of the Creator are accomplished. God works by races, and one was appointed in due season and after many developments to reveal and expound in this land the spiritual nature of man. The Aryan and the Semite are of the same blood and origin, but when they quitted their central land they were ordained to follow opposite courses. Each division of the great race has developed one portion of the double nature of humanity, till after all their wanderings they met again, and, represented by their two choicest families, the Hellenes and the Hebrews, brought together the treasures of their accumulated wisdom and secured the civilisation of man.[130]

Disraeli concedes Arnold's distinction between the Hellenes and Hebrews, but demonstrates that each race enacts an essential aspect of the unfolding of religious history.

Following his publication of *Lothair* in May of 1870, Disraeli produced the 'General Preface' to a new edition of his collected novels in October. The Preface remains a neglected text for Disraeli's unambiguous and repeated insistence that 'God works through races'. He began by claiming that in the Young England trilogy,

> it seemed to me the time had arrived when it became my duty to ascend to the origin of that great ecclesiastical corporation [the Church of England], and consider the position of the descendants of that race had been the founders of Christianity. Some of the great truths of ethnology were necessarily involved in such discussions.[131]

By ethnology, it quickly becomes clear that Disraeli means the racial and religious politics that dictate the destiny of a race: a race's particular religious inheritance and ordained path. Indeed, the passage continues, 'The tradition of the Anglican Church was powerful. Resting

[130] *Ibid*., p. 314.
[131] *Idem*., 'General Preface' in *Lothair*, p. xviii.

on the Church of Jerusalem, modified by the divine school of Galilee, it would have that rock of truth which Providence, *by the instrumentality of the Semitic race*, had promised to St. Peter'.[132] He reiterated this point – that race was a means for the manifestation of religious providence – in the next passage. 'The Divine government of this world', he wrote, had 'ordained that the sacred purposes should be effected by the *instrumentality of various human races'*.[133] This racial ordination, and the consequent conflict between races, moreover, formed part of a cyclical pattern of biblical truth that continued to unravel in the nineteenth century. Disraeli continued,

> there must be occasionally a jealous discontent with the revelation entrusted to a particular family. But there is no reason to believe that the Teutonic rebellion of this century against the Divine truths entrusted to the Semites will ultimately meet with more success . . . [it] has been sustained by the highest intellectual gifts that human nature has ever displayed; but when the tumult subsides, the Divine truths are found to be not less prevalent than before, and simply because they are divine. Man brings to the study of the oracles more learning and more criticism than of yore: and it is well that it should be so. The documents will yet bear a greater amount of erudition and examination then they have received; but the word of God is eternal, and will survive the spheres.[134]

German higher criticism and debates about the veracity of Scripture, Disraeli specifies, cannot change or disrupt God's plan for the Semitic or Aryan races. Racial science and ethnology remain the instruments of a theistically-governed universe. He went on to refute the 'sceptical effects of the discoveries of science, and the uneasy feeling that they cannot co-exist with our old religious convictions'.[135] Commentators should understand scientific discovery, he claimed, as part of a complementary, inextricable relationship between scientific and spiritual truth, which formed the narrative of history. In Disraeli's words:

> Scientific like spiritual truth has ever from the beginning been descending from Heaven to man. He is a being who organically demands direct relations with his Creator, and he would not have been so organised if his requirements could not be satisfied. We may analyse the sun and penetrate the stars, but man is conscious that

[132] *Ibid*., p. xv. My italics.
[133] *Ibid*., p. xvi. My italics.
[134] *Ibid*.
[135] *Ibid*.

> he is made in God's own image, and in his perplexity he will ever appeal to our Father which art in Heaven.[136]

Disraeli's 'racial doctrine', just as the racial doctrines of Blumenbach, Prichard, Kingsley, Coleridge, and Arnold, had as its Creator and perpetuator 'our Father which art in Heaven'.

In many ways the 'General Preface' represents the culmination of Disraeli's racial and religious thought; it came at the end of a line of texts in which he consistently expressed the notion that 'God works through races'. Just as in *Alroy, Coningsby*, *Tancred*, and *Lord George Bentinck*, in which Disraeli conceived of the Hebrew and English nation as part of a grand narrative of salvation, in the Preface Disraeli shows that the racial tensions between Semites and Aryans form part of the grist of religious history. In calling upon the 'great truths of ethnology', moreover, Disraeli engaged with an intellectual project in which the rise of racial science concurrently interacted with the decline of scriptural authority and debates over the supremacy of Christian doctrine. In using and inflecting scripture in his novels to express his ideas about race, Disraeli took part in a redefinition of what it meant to be religious, and what it meant to be rational, in nineteenth-century Britain.

[136] *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xviii.

CHAPTER 5

NATION

> Those great men, who have periodically risen to guide the helm of our government in times of tumultuous and stormy exigency knew that a State is a complicated creation of refined art . . . They looked upon the nation as a family and upon the country as a landed inheritance.[1]

It has become clear that this thesis is not concerned with Disraeli's political activity, a subject that has been well-documented by numerous historians. But the manner in which the religious ideas explained in the last four chapters related to Disraeli's political *thought* cannot be left unexplored. Paul Smith memorably stated, 'Disraeli's role was to dream the dreams, not to implement them'.[2] But as we have seen, historians have had remarkably little to say about the nature of Disraeli's dreams. They have overwhelmingly focused on the opportunism with which Disraeli acted in parliament; as David Cesarani wrote about Disraeli's passage of the Royal Titles Bill of 1876, 'as always with Disraeli, the act had a calculated domestic function'.[3] This epitomizes the approach to Disraeli's political actions throughout his career.

This chapter, on the contrary, focuses on the religious ideas that undergirded aspects of Disraeli's political ideology. Rather than accepting the conclusion of the majority of studies – that 'as a practical politician [Disraeli] was largely uninfluenced by principles or beliefs' – it begins to image some ways in which Disraeli's religious ideas operated compatibly with his political thought.[4] The theological priorities established in the preceding chapters – his interest in biblical nations, his celebration of the Jewish theocracy, his cry for belief amid a faithless polity, his nostalgia for a purer religious moment in England's past – established a powerful connection to his vision of the constitution, land, and people of the England. This

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[1] Benjamin Disraeli, *Vindication of the English Constitution* (London, 1835), pp. 23-4.
[2] Support for this approach can be found in many historians' suggestions that that Disraeli kept his Toryism as a set of ideas and attitudes, rather than a collection of robust policies. See Paul Smith, *Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform* (Toronto, 1967), p. 200; see also pp. 1-37, 200-66.
[3] David Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician* (New Haven, 2016), p. 187.
[4] John Vincent, *Disraeli* (London, 1990), p. 43.

chapter will not delve into his political actions and parliamentary manoeuvring; it looks, rather, at the sacred quality that Disraeli ascribed to the English nation, and his repeated cry for necessity of religious virtue to its destiny as a political entity.

In interpreting many of Disraeli's political priorities, historians have emphasized the fickleness of his principles in his question for power. But when we revisit some of his main political concerns moments with an awareness of his religious ideas, it becomes clear that Disraeli was motivated by what he interpreted as his call to preserve the blessed English nation: its territorial constitution, composed of almost spiritual contracts between the people and their aristocratic leaders, the people and their Church, and the people and their Queen. Disraeli's political maturity spanned a unique period in the formation of the political nation in Britain. Within the savage debates over the role of democracy, the question of what kind of nation Britain comprised, and how it should define itself domestically and especially on the foreign stage, gained urgency.[5] In *A Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835) Disraeli claimed that, 'Nations have characters, as well as individuals'.[6] He believed that England had inherited a sacred character; its people formed a chosen race; and it was the task of 'great men' to guide the nation on its path of continued sanctity. Just as his conception of race and chosenness were formed within a religious metanarrative, establishing Disraeli's notion of the nation requires first recognizing the discourse of religious nationhood in which he wrote.

The first section demonstrates that Disraeli rooted the British constitution in the idea that England inherited a special, providential status akin to that of the prototypical nation, Israel. This view became popular enough for Charles Dickens to satirize it in *Our Mutual Friend*, when Mr Podsnap proclaims to a group of foreigners, 'We Englishmen are very proud of our Constitution. It was bestowed upon us by Providence'.[7] Rather than simply conforming to a conventional Burkean conservatism, as scholars have assumed, Disraeli viewed the

[5] For British national self-definition, see Jonathan Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*: *English Liberalism, National Identity and Europe 1830-1886* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 20.
[6] Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 16.
[7] Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), ed. A. Poole (London, 1991), p. 137; qtd. in Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867* (Farnham, 2011), p. 4.

constitution as a sacred text, which created faith-based contracts between the land, the Church, the aristocracy, the people, and the monarch. This religious and political constitution combined to form the character and the tenets of the nation, and occupied the centre of Disraeli's political vision. As he put it simply in 1872, 'Gentlemen, the programme of the Conservative party is to maintain the Constitution of the country'.[8] He wrote of history in macroscopic terms, as the fulfilment of a slowly unfolding, determined destiny, and viewed the constitution not as mere legislative machinery, but as a delicate treaty between the estates of the land in which all must actively *believe*. The second section demonstrates that like the constitution, Disraeli perceived the land of England as blessed with a special status. The Church acted as the most important means through which the sacred law of the land was implemented; indeed, Disraeli described land and Church as organic, pastoral institutions that grew from the soil of a favoured country. When the relationship between land and Church ruptured, constitutional principles crumbled, and the people suffered. Throughout his novels, Disraeli likened England to a biblical nation which struggles to stay on course in the face of temptation and corruption.

If, throughout his writing, Disraeli rejected individualism and self-government in favour of a divine and providential order, then the final section argues that this found expression in his views that representative, but not elective, principles should govern the nation's polity.[9] In *Vindication of the English Constitution* (1835) and *Sybil* (1845), Disraeli wrote his version of English history: a battle between self-interested and self-governing Liberals, and self-sacrificing and reverential Conservatives who obtained their positions not through individualism, but from the institutions of the country. Social anguish arose from self-interest; social liberty resulted from adherence to the constitutional alliance between Crown and Church.

[8] Benjamin Disraeli, 'Speech of the Right Hon. B. Disraeli, M.P. at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, April 3, 1872', *Bristol Selected Pamphlets* (London, 1872).
[9] These themes were developed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

I.

Constitution as sacred text

What defined the English nation? This question pressed itself on many other thinkers of the period, and pervaded political and cultural rhetoric. Like the category of 'race', it becomes difficult to nail down a singular definition of nation or nationhood in nineteenth-century thought. Jonathan Parry and Peter Mandler have discussed in recent years the extent to which the idea of the nation governed political attitudes and drove policy. Mandler claimed that while the idea of a 'national character' emerged within the conditions of Victorian intellectual history, most Englishmen still persisted in 'think[ing] of themselves as the products of civilization – however chancy and reversible that might be – than as the ideal types of racial [or national] myth'.[10] Parry revised this thesis by emphasizing that English writers *did* perceive an English national character, claiming that it was 'common for writers to trace and celebrate the ways in which historical development had shaped national consciousness', and that the idea of the national character shaped much political opinion.[11]

In Disraeli's case, the religious and biblical ideas that he invested in the nation helps to explain much of his writing about England. The connection that Disraeli drew between England and Israel throughout his fiction suggests that for him, England's religious nature – like Israel's – formed the basis of its special status and its divinely-given constitution. As Sir John Skelton maintained of Disraeli, "England was the Israel of his imagination"'.[12] If England was the new Israel, then constitutional contracts functioned as religious covenants of sorts, as they did in the Old Testament. We have seen Disraeli's exploration of these very themes in *Alroy* and *The Rise of Iskander*. The belief that the present nation remained

[10] Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), p. 105. See also Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall (eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender, and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000); Charlotte Mathieson, *Mobility in the Victorian Novel: Placing the Nation* (Basingstoke, 2015); Colin Graham, *Ideologies of Epic: Nation, Empire, and Victorian Epic Poetry* (Manchester, 1998).
[11] Parry, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 24.
[12] Qtd. in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York, 1968). p. 75.

accountable for biblical laws dominated *Sybil*. Most commentators point to his apparent apathy at the suffering of Bulgarian Christians at the hands of the Turks as evidence of Disraeli's broader religious and moral indifference, especially compared to Gladstone's position on the issue.[13] In fact, Disraeli's stance makes more sense in the context of his idea of England as a providentially favoured nation, whose history comprised a continuation of the events of the Bible and ancient world, and whose constitution functioned as a sacred text.

For Disraeli, the key to the connection between these ancient religious truths and the present lay the Middle East, or specifically, Israel: the prototypical nation, and the place where God had entered into the human narrative. The English nation had inherited Israel's ongoing dialectic between especial chosenness, and the dangerous forces of corruption that could lead it astray. Heidi Kaufman has demonstrated that Disraeli was far from the only writer to connect England and Israel: 'nineteenth-century novels frequently turned to representations of the theological and historical filiation of Jewish and Christian traditions and . . . depictions of this filiation played a profound role in conceptualizing English identity in this period'.[14] Disraeli invoked the proverbial nation of Israel because it contained a spiritual pedigree that England had lost at the hands of functionalist politics. Tancred asks,

> but where is the art? It seems to me the very quality wanting in our present condition. Art is order, method, harmonious results obtained by fine and powerful principles. I see no art in our condition. The people of this country have ceased to be a nation.[15]

This comprised much more than Blake's assessment of it as 'the somewhat bizarre, and, if the truth be admitted, woolly, Oriental philosophy which [Disraeli] professed from time to time – "the great Asian mystery"'.[16] When we take such passages seriously, Disraeli emerges as expressing the commonly-held nineteenth-century idea that nationhood embodied not simply a civic state of being: it embodied a specific spiritual status upheld by the polity.

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[13] An exception is Milos Kovic, *Disraeli and the Eastern Question* (Oxford, 2010), in which Kovic took Disraeli's ideas about Judaism and the East seriously, and viewed them as consistently informing his attitudes towards the East over time.
[14] Heidi Kaufman, *English Origins, Jewish Discourse, and the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (University Park, PA, 2009), pp. 1-2.
[15] Disraeli, *Tancred,* p. 51.
[16] Blake, *Disraeli*, p. 59.

This proximity between Disraeli's religious and constitutional visions becomes clear in *Tancred*, in which the doctrine of 'theocratic equality' comprises a reassertion of Disraeli's early political work, *Vindication of the English Constitution*. In both texts, Disraeli argued that ultimate equality between men in the sight of God coincided with the complete 'equality of our civil rights'. England had fallen into crisis because 'Christendom [was] in crisis' and that, in turn, was 'because it had abandoned the principles to which Christians owed their happiness'.[17] The chosen hero must walk the faithful path to consummate his covenant with God; and the polity of the nation must uphold their constitutional faith.

Even historians writing long after Blake have overlooked this connection between Disraeli's religious plea in *Tancred* and his view of the constitution as sacredly holding together Church and State. Most commentators express a cynical view of Disraeli's championing of Protestantism, especially in the 1860s. Cesarani attributed it to political opportunism: 'Partly for tactical reasons, to outflank and embarrass Gladstone, Disraeli took a leading position on religious issues and cast himself as a champion of the Anglican Church'.[18] But Disraeli stated over and over again that he believed that, through its constitution, the English nation inherited Israel's fusion of religious inheritance and civic laws, and that through religious disobedience, this connection had been ruptured. He claimed: 'The United Kingdom is a Protestant kingdom. The people of the United Kingdom are a Protestant people. They defend and cherish a Protestant throne'.[19] While this has been easily dismissed as shallow Protestant rhetoric, it takes on a new meaning when we consider it alongside Disraeli's deep interest in Jewish theocracy and biblical nations. He believed that religious identity was integrated into national identity. The constitution uniquely formed itself for this particular character of nature of the English nation; as Disraeli put it, 'The Constitution of England is founded not only on a profound knowledge of human nature, but of human nature in England'.[20] We know from his obsession with Israel in his fiction, that it was to this

[17] *Ibid*., pp. 329, 331.
[18] Cesarani, *Disraeli: The Novel Politician*, p. 162.
[19] *Hansard*, 3 Apr. 1868, vol. 191, c. 906.
[20] Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 206.

imagined nation that he harkened in these words, rather than a conventional Burkean conservatism or purely Protestant sentiment.

Like Israel, the English nation had an inherent character, and that character infused itself in the constitutional and ecclesiastical laws that governed the country. Indeed, a reviewer of Disraeli's *The Revolutionary Epick* (1834) noted that Disraeli explicitly identified the English nation as one of celestial, as opposed to terrestrial, character. Even before he published *Tancred* in 1847, the language of the Angel of Arabia's principle of 'theocratic equality' was perceived by the reviewer:

> The basis of English society is Equality. But here let us distinguish: there are two kinds of equality; there is the equality that levels and destroys, and the equality that elevates and creates. It is this last, this sublime, this celestial equality, that animates the laws of England. The principle of the first equality, base, terrestrial and groveling, is that no one should be privileged; the principle of English equality is that every one should be privileged.[21]

Jonathan Parry has shown that Disraeli's dedication to this specific vision of England acted centrally in his political motivations: his 'political outlook and behaviour were given coherence by his intense consciousness of England's history and character, which drove him to define his political career in terms of a heroic defense of national values, tradition, and power'.[22] The crucial thing to establish is that to Disraeli, like many of his contemporaries, 'England's history and character' contained a significant religious identity.

Indeed, placing emphasis on England as a special nation, and the English as a chosen people, Disraeli acted in consort with an increasingly prominent discourse of nationhood. He joined a current of organicism in nineteenth-century thought in defining the nation as a living, breathing entity, analogous to individuals. This has been recognized by some historians. James Pereiro, for example, has illustrated that this of mode thinking about races and nations – in which nations were almost anthropomorphized – aligned with a long-standing German Romanticism, especially in Herder, who, 'conceived national cultures as organic beings, each endowed with its own inborn character'. Pereiro has argued that like Herder, 'Disraeli

[21] Hughenden MSS, 226 E/IV/3f.
[22] Jonathan Parry, 'Disraeli and England' *The Historical Journal* 43 (2000), p. 700.

considered that political rationalism ignored a fundamental truth: that nations have characters, and that characters are closely connected with race'.[23]

But the fact that this discourse of national character often took on an explicitly religious tone has been lost when it comes to Disraeli's expression of nationhood. When Carlyle compared nations to individuals in *Past and Present* (1843) – 'With Nations it is as with individuals: Can they rede the riddle of Destiny?'[24] – he specifically claimed that divine law applied to nations and individuals in the same way: each underwent judgment and trial at the hand of God. This system of punishment had its root in the nation of Israel. In the text, Carlyle sought to awaken the English nation to its unrighteous acts and to illuminate its disfavour in the eyes of God. He compared his task to that of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah: 'When a Nation is unhappy, the old Prophet was right and not wrong in saying it: Ye have forgotten God, ye have quitted the ways of God, or ye would not have been unhappy'.[25] In his Romanes Lecture in 1896 on *The English National Character*, Mandell Creighton similarly conceived of the nation as adhering to a cyclical pattern of history akin to that described in the Old Testament. The difference between individuals and nations, he explained, is that 'individuals are judged for their actions; nations have a continuous character, and each generation is paying the penalty for the prejudices created by the actions of its predecessors'. [26]

In his novels, Disraeli constructed an English nation that was conditioned by the same pattern of retribution.[27] In *Alroy* this remained the case for both the chosen king, who angered God and broke his covenant, but also for the Israelite nation, which, at the time of the story, found itself caught in in a narrative pattern of captivity. *The Rise of Iskander* featured the same religious tale of captivity in the case of the Christian nation. In *Sybil* Disraeli applied the Old Testament cycle of sin and redemption law to the condition of England question. Like

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[23] James Pereiro, 'The Reformation and the Principles of the English Constitution in Disraeli's "Young England" Novels', in Peter Nockles (ed.), 'Reinventing the Reformation in the Nineteenth Century: A Cultural History', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 90:1 (2014), p. 323.
[24] Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* ed. Richard D. Altick (New York, 1977), p. 13.
[25] See Isaiah 17:10; Jeremiah 3:21, 13:25.
[26] Mandell Creighton, *The English National Character* (Oxford, 1896), p. 6.
[27] For changing views of providence in historical and religious thought, see James Kirby, *Historians and the Church of England: Religion and Historical Scholarship, 1870-1920* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 189-211.

Carlyle, he imagined the God of England as the angered God of the Israelites; only a return to faithful obedience could realign the nation with the will of God; only such a realignment created social concord.[28] And in *Tancred*, Disraeli interrogated the feasibility – and lack thereof – of supplanting the religious character of the modern Holy Land onto Victorian Britain.

Thus, for these thinkers, as well as Disraeli, the British nation never became exempt from the Old Testament law, it merely became ignorant of it. Carlyle observed that the English nation remained accountable to 'laws older than the World, old as the Maker's first Plan of the World'.[29] Both *Sybil* and *Past and Present* looked to the medieval church as the interface between Hebrew law and the English nation. Carlyle saw in Abbot Samson and the monastery at Bury St Edmunds what Richard Altick has described as 'a running symbol of the fulfillment of Christian society's purpose, just as [his] description of the current state of England represents its frustration'.[30] He expressed the consequence of this disobedience: the 'redtape philosophy . . . expediencies, [and] clubroom moralities' caused deprivation, lack of faith, and general misery, in spite of the economic success of the Empire. He specified that the material wealth and growing economies of England could not evade God's judgment:

> In this God's-world, with its wild-whirling eddies and mad foam-oceans, where men and nations perish as if without law, and judgment for an unjust thing is sternly delayed, dost thou think that there is therefore no justice? . . . I tell thee again, there is nothing else but justice.[31]

The salvation of the nation lay in its ability to restore itself to obedience of the law and to maintain that unbroken link with its past, in which it engaged in a live relationship with God.

Carlyle requires stressing because Disraeli saw the British constitution serving the nation in the same way; it was a sacred text which sustained a link between the nation,

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[28] See Rolf P. Lessenick, 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England: The Jewish Contribution to British Civilization in Benjamin Disraeli's Trilogy' in Franc Link (ed.), *Jewish Life and Suffering as Mirrored in English and American Literature* (Paderborn, 1987), p. 38. As we have seen, Lessenich is one of the few scholars who has drawn out the Old Testament system that undergirds the morality of *Sybil*.
[29] Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 17.
[30] Richard D. Altick, 'Introduction' in Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. xv.
[31] *Ibid*., p. 16.

religious principles, and the hand of Providence that bounded them all together. If Disraeli conceptualized the institutions of the nation as blessed, and as the harbingers of morality in the country, it followed that the search for true national and constitutional principles in the Young England novels became inherently a religious quest.[32] The novels present moral treatises about how British society can return to religious, and thereby, political concord. The majority of recent historians overlook the religious content of the Young England novels precisely because they view the works as works of political propaganda. Blake argued, for example, that *Coningsby* and *Sybil* were repositories for 'Disraeli's Tory theory of history and the doctrine of Young England are expounded'.[33] More recently, Robert O'Kell has claimed that the trilogy was most concerned with 'the development of a compensatory, ideal, heroic, political identity', but understood the heroic to function in literary, rather than religious terms.[34]

Yet, contemporary critics noticed the conspicuous lack of overt political or social program within the supposedly 'political novels', and viewed them as moral and religious callings. Just as early biographers offer a perception of Disraeli's religious thought within the contemporaneous theological landscape, it becomes noteworthy that early reviewers of the novels saw Disraeli operating in the moral, rather than the political or economic sphere in his fictional manifestos for the nation. One reviewer of *Sybil* in June of 1845 noted that 'the promises of reform and amelioration to be introduced by Young England are not very distinctly defined nor very cogently urged'.[35] In his volume of collected reviews of Disraeli's fiction, R.W. Stewart noted that in *Coningsby*, Disraeli 'appeals to the manufacturers to emulate the supposed care of feudal landlords for their tenantry, but never examines any real economic argument about the relations of Capital and Labour, nor seeks the economic causes of the

[32] See Jeremy Morris, *F.D. Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (Oxford, 2008), p. 99. Disraeli joined other thinkers who sought moral renewal as a remedy for the harshness of the economic and social condition of England. As Morris has shown, 'Both Maurice and Carlyle, the one an English convert to the Established Church, the other a Scottish free-thinker, considered social disorder at root a moral and religious problem'.
[33] Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966), p. 194.
[34] Robert O'Kell, *Disraeli: The Romance of Politics* (Toronto, 2013), p. 213.
[35] Hughenden MSS 227 E/IV/8b, *Douglas Jerrold's Shilling Magazine* VI, June 1845, London.

miseries which he ascribes to moral failure'.[36] The reception of *Coningsby* demonstrates that readers understood the novel to promote a moral, rather than a practical relief to the condition of England. The Reverend James Rudge, rector of Hawkchurch, Devon (no political economist), wrote to Disraeli to express the 'singular delight' with which he had read Coningsby, claiming that the only means of saving the country were 'those suggested in your admirable work'.[37]

Disraeli's idea that religious virtue vitally contributed to a healthy constitution and polity found the most potent expression in *Sybil*. In their betrayal of the covenant between land, church, aristocracy, and crown – the covenant that forms the content of the Constitution – the 'lay abbots of Marney' in the novel wreak havoc on the working people in their care. Disraeli describes their infidelity in the language of bequest; the current Lord Marney inherits the sins of his ancestors.[38] The Marneys' ancestor, Baldwin Greymount, emerges as 'the old gentleman-usher of one of King Henry's plundering vicar-generals', whose descendants would go on in the seventeenth century to 'spoliate their church and betray their king'.[39] Disraeli portrays the Marneys as having acted instrumentally in the Reformation which, for him, one of the major ruptures between the modern age, and England's blessed position as the New Jerusalem. James Pereiro is among few scholars who have written about the religious dimension in Disraeli's vision of the constitution. As he put it, in Disraeli's eyes, England 'had been blessed with a constitution founded on a profound knowledge of human nature in general and of English human nature in particular . . . The Reformation had abruptly upset that balance, overlaying the constitution with alien elements'.[40] Pereiro argued that Disraeli shared his view of the disruption of Protestantism with William Cobbett: for each, the dissolution of the monasteries set into motion a particular type of destruction to the fabric of

[36] R.W. Stewart, *Disraeli's Novels Reviewed, 1826-1968* (New Jersey, 1975), p. xiv.
[37] Hughenden MSS H/E/VI/0/81, Rudge to Disraeli, 4 Dec. 1844.
[38] Isaiah 14:21.
[39] Disraeli, *Sybil, or, The Two Nations*, ed. Sheila M. Smith (Oxford, 1981), pp. 11-12.
[40] Pereiro, 'The Reformation and the Principles of the English Constitution', pp. 326-7. See also John McAllister Ulrich, *Signs of Their Times: History, Labor, and the Body in Cobbett, Carlyle, and Disraeli* (Athens, 2002).

English society. The plunder of the Reformation translated into a continual pillage of the poor by wealthy landowners, who exploited their labourers without upholding their side of an inherited social and religious contract.

In much of his rhetoric on nationhood and constitution, then, Disraeli described the nation as chosen, and the constitution as sacred. This is seen most powerfully in his explicit association of England with Israel throughout his works, and by his use of the language of faith when he explained constitutional contracts – or covenants – between the institutions of the country. In Disraeli's religious imagination, England remained answerable to the ancient laws and tenets which God had instilled in his nations. The next section turns to the manner in which this faith-based understanding of the nation and constitution extended to the nation's land.

II.

The soil of England: the sanctity of land

Like the constitution, Disraeli ascribed a special status to the land – literally, the soil – of the nation. The sacred constitution required a strong territorial aristocracy; Disraeli believed that political representation remained applicable only to those who had a direct connection to, and inheritance of, British lands. This system held itself together by something which transcended the constitution itself: faith. Young Englander Alexander Baillie-Cochrane lamented that there were "few among our richest men who look upon their property as a sacred trust for others'".[41] The special and inherent privileges of the aristocracy, the exalted status of the land, and the spiritual nature of the crown, as Disraeli described them, required the work of some kind of religious grace, rather than legislative neatness. The aristocracy remained, in Disraeli's words, 'distinguished from ordinary freemen by privileges inherent in their blood'.[42] In order for them to rise to their chosen status, they must receive their land as a kind of religious inheritance and steward it accordingly, through maintaining a righteous commitment to the territorial contract.

Indeed, Disraeli endowed the land and its owners with a religious status which has been lost in readings of his Toryism. For Disraeli, the aristocracy possessed an inherent, providentially-determined privilege, which vitally participated in the delicate faith-based structure of the constitution. Their inheritance arose from their land ownership; 'instead of meanly submitting to fiscal immunities, [they] support upon their broad and cultivated lands all the burthens of the state'.[43] He explained that the territorial nature of property rendered it inherently representative.

> But gentlemen, you must look to the nature of this property. It is visible property, and therefore it is responsible property, which every ratepayer in the room knows to his cost. But, gentlemen, it is not only visible property; it is, generally speaking, territorial

[41] Pereiro, 'The Reformation and the Principles of the English Constitution', p. 333.
[42] Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 85.
[43] *Ibid*. pp. 85-6.

> property; and one of the elements of territorial property is that it is representative.[44]

England entrusted land to its landowners as a preserve of the nation, rather than as a personal possession; landownership entailed an implicit covenant between nation, aristocrat, and people. If proprietors adhered to this covenant, they fulfilled their duty as the trustees, rather than the tyrannical masters, of the nation. As Disraeli put it, 'The English nation . . . have invested certain orders of their fellow subjects with legislative functions: but these estates, however highly privileged, are invested with no quality of exclusion; and the Peers and the Commons of England are the trustees of the nation, not its masters.[45]

Disraeli described England as, like Israel, endowed with a special sanctity of people-and-land. Just as God symbolically and spiritually tied the Israelites to the land of Israel, so did He connect the polity of England to their homeland. Both nations were 'chosen' and both nations inherited a divine set of laws and codes which ordered their society. In *Vindication* Disraeli drew the connection explicitly:

> Thus the English in politics are as the old Hebrews in religion, 'a favoured and peculiar people' . . . Hence the admirable order, which is the characteristic of our society; for in England every man knows or finds his place; the law has supplied every man with a position, and nature has a liberal charter to amend the arrangement of the law. Our equality is the safety valve of tumultuous spirits; our gradation the security of the humble and the meek.[46]

As we have seen, his reverence for the Jewish theocracy undergirded Disraeli's political vision of a total coherence of Church and State. It also formed the foundation of the British Constitution. Its consistency with the Christian gospel echoes in the phrase 'humble and meek' from Jesus' Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew. The virtuous vicar in *Sybil*, Aubrey St. Lys, describes this broad, Judeo-Christian religious code of the Constitution as one passed down directly from Christ, the ultimate prophet in Jewish history. 'When Omnipotence deigned to be incarnate, the Ineffable Word did not select a Roman frame . . . No, I should look to a land

[44] Disraeli, 'Speech of the Right Hon. B. Disraeli, M.P. at the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, April 3, 1872' (1872).
[45] Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 207.
[46] *Ibid*., p. 205.

more distant than Italy, to a city more sacred even than Rome'.[47] The antiquity and sanctity of the English constitution, enshrined in the history of the Hebrews and carried forward by the Church of Rome, accomplished a delicate balance to which Disraeli alluded time and time again in his texts: 'That Constitution has . . . proved the compatibility of sectarian toleration and national orthodoxy'.[48] The conservative, and yet evolutionary, nature of the Jewish religious tradition meant that it existed in dialogue with, and in adaptation alongside, the Constitution and other creeds. Thus St. Lys in *Sybil* 'recognise[s] in the church an institution thoroughly, sincerely catholic: adapted to all climes, and to all ages'.[49] Land and church as Disraeli advocated them – broad, spiritual, and un-doctrinal – inherited this Judeo-Christian creed as it evolved throughout the ages.

It followed that the people's relationship with land and church became representative of their religious obedience. Emulating the Old Testament theme of exile and deliverance, Disraeli used the soil and landscape of England throughout his novels as a metaphor for the health of its people.[50] When landlords neglected their workers and the Church failed to deliver alms, the workers' environs become squalid and diseased; they long for a return to pastoral purity. Within this symbolic land and moral economy, the Church arose as a metaphorical extension of the soil, and its moral output served an indispensable role in binding together the landowners and governors to the working people. In one of his parochial speeches in Aylesbury in 1861, Disraeli described the Church as an organic growth of the nation itself.

> By the side of the State in England there has gradually arisen a majestic corporation – wealthy, powerful, independent – with the sanctity of a long tradition, yet sympathising with authority, and full of conciliation, even deference, to the civil power. *Broadly and deeply planted in the land*, mixed up with all our manners and customs, one of the main guarantees of our local government, and therefore one of the prime securities of our common liberties, the Church of England is part of our history, part of our life, part of England itself.[51]

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[47] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 112.
[48] *Idem*., *Vindication*, p. 209.
[49] *Idem*., *Sybil*, p. 112.
[50] See Robert Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867: The Making of the Second Reform Act* (Farnham, 2011), 5. Disraeli was not the only one, of course, to use the language of soil and land. Saunders records Peel's question, regarding continental revolutions in the 1840s, 'The soil of Europe is deeply undermined; is that of England herself unshakeable?'.
[51] Qtd. in *M&B*, iv, p. 362. My emphasis.

In Disraeli's vision of the country, the Church offered working people a place in the Constitution by mediating the relationship between landowners and their workers, through liturgy, worship, and alms. It ensured that the doctrine of 'theocratic equality' pervaded the Constitutional relationship between different classes: all men stood equal in the sight of God, and in the sight of the Church. As the righteous vicar of Mowbray in *Sybil* maintains, 'in the presence of God, all were brethren'.[52] Indeed, as Disraeli maintained in *Vindication*,

> The Church is part of our Constitution, and its character has changed in unison with that Constitution . . . The English Constitution, while it has secured that toleration, absolute and illimitable, has also consecrated the State; it has proved that religious government and religious liberty are not incompatible. It is one of the leading principles of our polity that the religious discipline and future welfare of our citizens are even of greater importance than their political and present well-being.[53]

The ministers of the Church comprised the State's 'children' and the constitution 'established their order into an estate of the kingdom'.[54] Like an aristocracy, the clergy enjoyed an inherent privilege from God to care for the polity and to ensure that the people spoke through them. Disraeli argued that 'the great art in creating an efficient Representative government is, to secure its representation of those interests of the country which are at the same time not only considerable, but in their nature permanent'.[55] Clergy – especially bishops – formed the bridge between the people and the aristocracy. Disraeli 'considered that the bench of Bishops was the most democratic', explaining: 'to me it seems that Bishop of Durham, or of Winchester, affords, from his position, the probable materials of as efficient a member of the Upper House as any Earl or Marquis who bears those names'.[56]

Scholars have often interpreted these portraits of religious wholeness in the Young England novels as representative of, in the words of Paul Smith, 'the not unusual pattern of romantic evolution' which ended in 'settled tradition, organic community, and shared belief,

[52] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 111.
[53] *Idem*., *Vindication*, pp. 137-8.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] *Ibid*., p. 134.
[56] *Ibid*., p. 135.

commonly derived from an idealised version of the past'.[57] What they miss is that Disraeli clearly presented land ownership – the foundation of the nation and the territorial constitution – as a form of religious inheritance, rather than as an areligious romantic utopia. We can see the explicit connection Disraeli drew to the Judeo-Christian religious inheritance in the fact that he presented failure to uphold one's duty as a landowner was tantamount to sacrilege.[58] In *Sybil*, Lord Marney (the protagonist Egremont's brother), who exploits his labourers is stoned to death by the people he abuses: biblical punishment for sacrilege. The character of the nation, and consequently the social and political behaviour of its wealthy landowners, remained inextricably connected to a larger cycle of religious retribution: England's damnation came from its blindness to this cycle. Disraeli describes the corruption of the innocent land at the hands of the Marneys; the town of Marney has 'a spreading dale, contiguous to the margin of a clear and lively stream, surrounded by meadows and gardens, and backed by lofty hills, undulated and richly wooded . . . Beautiful illusion! For behind that laughing landscape, penury and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population'.[59]

The Marney's physical and moral spoliation spreads disease and rot on their lands and infect its people. The narrator contrasts the pastoral countryside with the 'narrow and crowded lanes' with their 'wretched tenements' of 'swarming walls' and 'the humid and putrid roo[ves] of thatch exhaling malaria like all other decaying vegetable matter'.[60] The moral condition of the people takes on a physical consequence: they become a 'family of toil, Fever, in every form, pale Consumption, exhausting Synochus, and trembling Ague'. After 'cultivating the broad fields of merry England, the bold British peasant, return[s] to encounter the word of diseases'.[61] The nation's sin has perverted human nature; what should be the emulation of the Madonna and child, is described instead as a scene of pain: 'the virtuous mother in the sacred pangs of childbirth gives forth another victim to our thoughtless

[57] Paul Smith, *Disraeli* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 59.
[58] See Sir Henry Spelman, *The History and Fate of Sacrilege* (London, 1698).
[59] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 51.
[60] *Ibid*., pp. 51-2.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 53.

civilization . . . while the father of the coming child . . . lies stricken by that typhus which his contaminating dwelling has breathed into his veins'.[62]

Disraeli's narrator alludes to the possibility for redemption for the people of Marney, but Disraeli pointedly suggests that the apathy of the Church at Marney perpetuates the cycle of sin and disease which poisons the land and the polity.

> The eyes of this unhappy race might have been raised to the solitary spire that sprang up in the midst of them, the bearer of present consolation, the harbinger of future equality; but Holy Church at Marney had forgotten her sacred mission . . . the vicar, an orderly man, deemed he did his duty if he preached each week two sermons, and enforced humility on his congregation, and enforced humility on his congregation, and gratitude for every blessing of this life.[63]

In *Sybil* Disraeli showcased what would happen if the sacred institution which is meant to uphold the people, fails them. But in connecting the poor working people of Marney to the biblical nation of Israel, to whom salvation is promised, Disraeli also showed that despite the current ineptitude of their temporal powers, the English nation was enfolded in a larger cycle of Israelite-like deliverance.

> The people of Marney took refuge in conventicles, which abounded; little plain buildings of pale brick, with the names painted on them of Sion, Bethel, Bethesda; names of a distant land, and the language of a persecuted race; yet such is the mysterious power of their divine quality, breathing consolation in the nineteenth century to the harassed forms and the harrowed souls of a Saxon peasantry.[64]

Disraeli joined together images of downtrodden peasants with biblical healing: Bethesda meaning 'House of Mercy', and Bethel, 'House of God'. When the political nation fails them, the promise of a restored religious nation upkeeps them. The famous 'Two nations' discourse introduced by the novel reflected the fracture between the political and religious nations, and the seemingly impassable gulf between 'THE RICH AND THE POOR'.[65]

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[62] *Ibid*., p. 52.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 54.
[64] *Ibid*. Cf. Disraeli, *Tancred, or, The New Crusade* (vol. IX, *Novels and Tales by the Earl of Beaconsfield*, London, 1881), pp. 395-400 for the harvest scene in which modern Jews similarly partake of ancient biblical customs which connect them to their religious inheritance despite their present persecution.
[65] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 66.

As soon as the narrator has introduced the 'two nations' concept, 'a sudden flush of rosy light, suffusing the grey ruins, indicated that the sun had just fallen' and Egremont begins to hear 'an evening hymn to the Virgin' sung by 'a single voice; but tones of almost supernatural sweetness'. Disraeli introduces the character of Sybil at the very moment in which Egremont despairs of the rift between the nations: 'the words on the lips of Egremont, that would have asked some explanation of this sweet and holy mystery, when, in the vacant and star-lit arch on which his glance was fixed, he beheld a female form'.[66] In her celestial female appearance and her hymn to the Virgin, Sybil symbolizes a restored and intact image of the Virgin Mary, in marked contrast to the sickly woman in agonizing childbirth within the diseased village of Marney from the previous scene. Through Sybil, Disraeli presented a way to bring the estranged political and religious nations back into concord through a restored relationship to the land. All around her, the land begins to literally reclaim the ruins of Marney Abbey, which stands amid 'luxuriant vegetation, bounded on either side by rich hanging woods', with the stone 'moss-grown and mouldering'.[67] Disraeli deepened this connection between the soil of the nation and its Church in Sybil's remark to her father: 'I hope . . . if we ever regain our right, my father, and that we ever can, save by the interposition of divine will, seems to me clearly impossible, that you will never forget how bitter it is to be driven from the soil; and that you will bring back the people to the land'.[68]

In the subsequent exchange between Sybil's father and the young Chartist Stephen Morley, Disraeli created a biblical context to this link between the land and polity.

> 'Nay, thou shalt have thy way, Stephen,' said his companion, smiling, 'if ever the good hour come. As many acres as thou choosest for thy new Jerusalem'.
> 'Call it what you will, Walter,' replied Stephen; 'but if I ever gain the opportunity of fully carrying the principle of association into practice, I will sing "Nunc me dimittes"'.
> '"Nunc me dimittes"', burst forth [Sybil], in a voice of thrilling melody, and she pursed for some minutes the divine canticle.[69]

[66] *Ibid*.
[67] *Ibid*., p. 57.
[68] *Ibid*., p. 81.
[69] *Ibid*., p. 82.

In this scene, Disraeli explicitly aligned the regeneration of the people in the 'hungry forties' with the narrative of salvation in the Gospels. In the Gospel of Luke, the devout Simeon has been promised that he will not die until he has seen the Messiah. When he witnesses Jesus at His consecration in the Temple, he holds Jesus and says the words of the Nunc dimittis: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel'.[70] The characters in *Sybil* hope that their nation remains contained within this biblical scheme of ensured regeneration; they view England's land as a remote Promised Land which, like the Israelites, they can only regain through moral and political deliverance.

For Disraeli, the constitution mandated that the relationship between the faith and soil of England remained indissoluble. Sybil and her father's plea to 'regain our lands' becomes synonymous with the resurrection of Marney Abbey as a religious house, and the renewal of their 'ancient faith'.[71] Egremont claims, 'I have been thinking of late about these things; monasteries and so on; the influence of the old church system on the happiness and comfort of the People'.[72] Egremont barely finishes uttering these words when he meets Aubrey St. Lys, the vicar of Mowbray, who represents the foil of Lord Marney and his ineffectual vicar. St. Lys follows a monastic regime of obedience and faithfulness, while Lord Marney's ignorance and disobedience of the law directly causes the poverty of his people and the subsequent uprisings that lead to his ruin.[73] Mowbray Church ascends up from the landscape, and becomes a unifying symbol of the 'toiling thousands' who populate the land around it. The church, situated as it is within the land, embodies the 'magic in beautiful buildings which exercise an irresistible influence over the mind of man'.[74] The reader learns that St. Lys arrived when the congregation had dwindled to nearly zero, and 'came among a hundred thousand heathen to

[70] Luke 2: 29-32.
[71] Disraeli, *Sybil*, p. 82.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 105.
[73] See Lessenich, 'Synagogue, Church, and Young England', p. 39.
[74] Disraeli, *Sybil*, pp. 106-7.

preach "the Unknown God"'.[75] St. Lys's social agenda demands extending his ministry in the Church to the land: 'for there, in the presence of God, all were brethren. [The Church] shared equally among all its prayer, its incense, and its music; its sacred instructions, and the highest enjoyments that the arts could afford'.[76]

This seemingly esoteric view of the land as imbued with especial religious significance did not remain in the confines of Disraeli's literature. Indeed, his promotion of the land as a sacred aspect of the English Constitution expressed itself in one of the most famous episodes of his career: the 1867 Reform Act. Disraeli framed his debates on reform in the language of chosenness that we have explored above. He articulated his notion from *Vindication* that the people, even those without a vote, could already be accounted for by a constitution that had sacredly evolved over the years to guarantee the health of the country. The nation was founded upon the aristocratic principle; that is, government by men who had been chosen from birth to govern, and crucially, were made fit to govern by their ownership of land. In an early debate in 1865, Disraeli referred to his government's proposed reform bill in 1859:

> We knew that the Constitution of this country is a monarchy tempered by the authority of co-ordinate estates of the realm. We knew that the House of Commons is an estate of the realm. We knew that an estate of the realm is a political body, invested with political power for the Government of the country and for the public good; therefore a body founded upon privilege and not upon right. It is therefore in the noblest and profoundest sense of the word an aristocratic body, and from the first the estate of the Commons has had that character.[77]

Disraeli's idea of an aristocratic body depended upon his notion of providential favouritism and the organic chosen-ness of the nation, its constitution, and its landowning leaders. That given-ness needed protecting if the special status of England were to be preserved. As Disraeli told the House on May 8, 1865,

> There is no country at the present moment that exists under the circumstances and under the same conditions as the people of this realm. You have, for example, an ancient, powerful, richly-endowed Church and perfect religious liberty. You have unbroken order and complete freedom. You have landed estates as large as the Romans,

[75] *Ibid*., p. 107.
[76] *Ibid*., p. 111.
[77] *Hansard*, 8 May, 1865, vol. 178 c. 1699.

> combined with commercial enterprize such as Carthage and Venice united never equalled. And you must remember that this peculiar country, with these strong contrasts, is not governed by force; it is not governed by standing armies; it is governed by a most singular series of traditionary influences, which generation after generation cherishes and preserves because they know that they embalm customs and represent law. And, with this, what have you done? You have created the greatest Empire of modern time. You have amassed a capital of fabulous amount. . . And all these mighty creations are out of all proportion to the essential and indigenous elements and resources of the country. If you destroy that state of society, remember this—England cannot begin again.[78]

England could not begin again because its national disposition was not created, it was given; it was inherited. The job of the government, argued Disraeli, was to steer through Reform that maintained the delicate constitutional balance already in play.

In proposing how this balance could be protected, Disraeli expressed his notion that a connection to the land had the potential to transform working class men into faithful citizens. For much of the Second Reform Act debate, and beginning in 1866 when Lord Dunkellin proposed an amendment on Gladstone's Liberal Reform Bill, Disraeli and Derby advocated a system of 'rating' as a promising way to grant votes to responsible working class men without conceding to universal suffrage.[79] Those householders who paid their taxes directly, without going through a landlord, represented more responsible, politically-mature men who proved themselves worthy of electoral representation. By March 1867, Disraeli was arguing for granting up to four votes to men who paid their taxes directly, possessed savings in the bank, or had some kind of higher education.[80] Just as connection to the soil acted as a guarantor for an aristocrat's duty to the nation, here Disraeli imagined that participation in the civil process through direct taxation, and a great connection to the land and property through direct ownership, would assure that the voter had a personal connection and accountability to the country. He told the House of Commons on 12 April,

> the principle of rating was one which was consecrated by the manners and customs of this country, that it was a very ancient

[78] *Hansard*, 8 May, 1865, vol. 178 c. 1703.
[79] See *M&B*, iv, pp.437-8.
[80] For a good and condensed summary of the Reform debates in March and April, 1867, see Douglas F. Sheppard, 'The Cave of Adullam, Household Suffrage, and the Passage of the Second Reform Act', *Parliamentary History* 14:2 (1995), pp. 149-72.

> custom, and even in a great degree that it was one to be traced to a remote period in connection with the enjoyment of civil and political rights. It is recognised by the common law; it is recognised by the statute law of past generations, and in the age in which we live it has formed a part and portion of one of the most famous laws connected with our political history—the Reform Act of 1832.[81]

In this manner, Disraeli situated reform within the constitutional vision he had expressed so saliently in the Young England novels. He became convinced of the reformative power of bringing men into the constitution, by grounding their political identities in their ownership of land and property, which he believed ensured the providential order of the country. The problem with working men remained the fact that they had not been included in the covenantal-like relationships that the constitution engendered between the classes. Those who paid full and direct rates were on the brink of exercising constitutional duties as it stood. And setting up a household suffrage based on rates would set the bar for those compound ratepayers who wanted to join the political process.

Connection to the land became the main criteria for gauging a citizen's connection to the constitution and thereby right to vote. When we consider Disraeli's religious representation of the English land throughout his writings, it becomes clear that his notion that the English land represented not merely a political, but a religious inheritance, undergirded some of his political expressions in 1867. His view of the sanctity of the land demonstrates that Israel was never far from his mind, and that in constructing his vision of Victorian England, he called upon the ideal of a nation governed by the blessedness of its land, and constitution.

[81] *Hansard*, 12 Apr. 1867, vol. 186 c. 1676.

III.

One (Faithful) Nation: the religious polity

When the people of England rose to their constitutional duties, they formed the ideal polity: a political and religious entity that constituted the fabric of the nation. Disraeli believed that this fabric was in danger of tearing by the forces of individualism, materialism, and perhaps at the point where these two ideologies met: Benthamite utilitarianism. This section argues that the English people as a religious polity, whose moral and material needs needed recognition by a 'divine government', undergirded Disraeli's political arguments about the people. His 'Church in danger' campaign in the 1860s, his legislation and rhetoric with regard to Irish church disestablishment, and his sponsoring of the Public Worship Regulation Act in 1874 all demonstrate Disraeli's belief that the English people required leadership which understood the religious temperament of the nation, something which could never be achieved by political economy or 'in mere dry pedantic political aphorisms'.[82]

As we have seen, Disraeli presented the health and faithfulness of the polity, as dependent upon the faithfulness of the people to the constitution. He described the crumbling of constitutional integrity in *A Vindication of the English Constitution* as a process akin to the destruction of the monasteries.[83] In each case, a generation of traditional, original interpreters became overtaken by a group of upstarts and traitors seeking to break with the past. Original constitutional writers like the abbots of Marney in *Sybil* revered and presided over a constitution that 'was universally recognised as an august and admirable fabric, and counted among the choicest inventions of public intellect on record'.[84] But a new class of 'political writers' had perverted the natural course of the constitution, turning it from a sacred and cohesive manifestation of the character of England, into a fractious warzone, in order 'to promulgate the opinions and maintain the interests of the party in the state in whose ranks

[82] *Hansard*, 28 Jun. 1847, vol. 93 c. 1041.
[83] See Peter Jupp, 'Disraeli's Interpretation of English History' in Paul Smith and Charles Richmond (eds.), *The Self-Fashioning of Disraeli* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 131-51.
[84] Disraeli, *Vindication*, p. 4.

they have been enrolled'.[85] In the cases of both the Church and the constitution, the threatening new class had an overriding characteristic in common: they were 'scientific'. The 'abstract principles of theoretic science' threatened the traditional fabric of the constitution. The 'avowed object of this new sect of statesmen is to submit the institutions of the country to the test of UTILITY, and to form a new Constitution on the abstract principles of theoretic science'.[86]

By 'utility', Disraeli meant a concept particular to this moment in nineteenth-century discourse. This was the quagmire of ideas begun by the social philosopher Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) idea of utility: 'it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong'. This axiom led Bentham and his followers to promote a governmental and legislative system which would maximize the pleasure, well-being, and profit of the greatest number of people in society over all else. Disraeli made clear in *Vindication* that the danger of the utilitarian system lay in its fundamental moral relativity; in his view, it threw off the obligations put forward to the polity by the covenantal-like constitution, and instead, lay open for corruption. In Disraeli's words,

> UTILITY, in short, is a mere phrase, to which any man may ascribe any meaning that his interests prompt, or his passions dictate . . . The same inventive sages, who have founded all political science on UTILITY, have founded all moral science on SELF-INTEREST, and have then declared that a system of government should be deduced alone from the principles of human nature.[87]

'Utility' directly conflicted with the Disraeli's view of the nation and society as organic growths, dictated by a cosmic and providential order. He denounced utilitarians for 'form[ing] political institutions on abstract principles of theoretic science, instead of permitting them to spring from the course of events, and to be naturally created by the necessities of nations'.[88] As Clyde J. Lewis explained as early as 1962, but to insufficient notice, for Disraeli 'what the rationalist pridefully called "human knowledge" changed with every generation, but God's

[85] *Ibid*.
[86] *Ibid*., pp. 5-6.
[87] *Ibid*., pp. 8-10.
[88] *Ibid*., p. 15.

truth could not be altered by human intelligence or ignored in the conduct of human affairs'.[89] Disraeli rooted the Constitution – the polity's charter and guide – in what Lewis described as 'inexorable laws . . . conformance to [which] was the main obligation of human existence'.[90] He derided the false hubris of political thinkers who claimed their own wills and theories could govern the country: 'The schoolmen are revived in the nineteenth century, and are going to settle the state with their withering definitions, their fruitless logomachies, and barren dialectics'.[91] To emphasize the extent of their sacrilege, Disraeli likened their zeal for their political economy to religious fervor: 'They omit no means of disseminating their creed: they are very active missionaries: there is no medium of the public press of which they do not avail themselves'.[92]

Utilitarian thought ultimately led to a dangerous system of equality and democracy, in which society valued each individual's will and desires equally, in which 'a privileged class is always an aristocracy, whether it consists of five thousand or fifty thousand', and in which the State becomes a 'representative polity, founded on universal suffrage'.[93] Like Lord Salisbury, Disraeli despised democracy, not because he thought that the common man was worthless, but because he believed the common man was better represented through the institutions which comprised the constitution. Providential order decreed that some men are born leaders, and that God throughout history endowed the aristocracy with the task of guiding the nation. This harkened back to the biblical notion that God chose His kings, and that leadership acted as tantamount to a religious covenant. Even Disraeli's political opponents such as Lord John Russell shared his view that, in Saunders' words, 'Britain claimed something superior to democracy: a mixed constitution, in which all classes were represented but none had a monopoly'.[94]

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[89] Clyde J. Lewis, 'Disraeli's Conception of Divine Order', *Jewish Social Studies* 24:3 (1962), p. 150.
[90] *Ibid*.
[91] Disraeli, *Vindication*, pp. 15-16.
[92] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[93] *Ibid*., p. 12.
[94] Saunders, *Democracy and the Vote in British Politics, 1848-1867*, p. 12.

Utiliarians, on the other hand, devised an '*a priori* system of celestial mechanics' which allowed them to bend the the nation to their own will. To allow the theories of political philosophers to dictate the laws of the land was to wrongly deify the common man; as Disraeli put it,

> Vox populi vox Dei, is a favourite adage, and ever on these persons' tongues: so that if the House of Commons be the House of the People, it is also the House of God; it is omniscience and omnipotent; —a convenient creed! There was a time when our kings affected to rule by divine right. It cost our fathers dear to root out that fatal superstition. But all their heroic labours will prove worse than fruitless, if the divine right of kings is to be succeeded by the divine right of the House of Commons . . . The Commons of England [rather,] form an Estate of the realm, and the members of the House of Commons represent that Estate. They represent nothing more.[95]

The House of God was not to be found in the House of Commons, but Disraeli asserted a fundamental connection between God and government in repudiating the ethos of utility. Speaking against Irish church disestablishment in 1868, he argued that the religious principle provided the government with the very authority to govern England at all.

> In this crisis, I say, it is of great importance that we should fully understand what we mean by a connection between Church and State. I will give my version of it. I understand by it that authority is to be not merely political; that Government is to be not merely an affair of force, but is to recognize its responsibility to the Divine Power. Sir, we have discarded the divine right of Kings, and properly discarded it, because the divine right of Kings led to the abuse of supernatural power by individuals; but an intelligent age will never discard the divine right of Government. If Government is not divine, it is nothing. It is a mere affair of the police-office, of the tax-gatherer, of the guard-room. Now, Sir, any man who has had any experience of affairs knows this—that every year Government becomes more difficult. It is its connection with the religious principle — it is not the guardroom, it is not the police-office, it is not the tax-gatherer—which enables it to rule the nation. You must educate the people; you must reform the criminal; you must establish asylums to meet all the wants of injured and suffering society.[96]

He repeated for emphasis the stark distinction between the government as a sensitive handler of the *Moralpolitik*, and on the other hand, as a crude collaboration of the 'police-office' and

[95] Disraeli, *Vindication*, pp. 65-6.
[96] *Hansard*, 3 Apr. 1868, vol. 191, c. 918.

'tax gatherer'. One was a sophisticated and divinely-sanctioned government; the other had degraded into the mechanical and formulaic, plagued by bureaucracy.

In defence of this 'divine government', in the 1860s, fuelled by an alliance with the Bishop of Oxford, Samuel Wilberforce, Disraeli embarked on a rhetorical campaign in defence of the established Church of England. A number of events in the 1850s had combined to destabilize the role of the Church in public life and politics. Specifically, the controversy over the increase of the Maynooth Grant in 1846, the re-establishment of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850 and arguments over church rates had contributed to arguments within the Church itself. It became clear that electoral success in the 1860s would rely on a clearly articulated stance on church issues, and Disraeli meant to use this to his advantage.

Allen Warren has demonstrated persuasively that Disraeli predicated his church defence on the notion that the state was a 'moral and spiritual' entity which must be protected by the Church.[97] Disraeli established 'a political and constitutional framework which linked the established Church to the historic identity of the English nation'.[98] The nation's moral integrity was under threat from 'the corrosive atheism of German theological scholarship, Enlightenment secularism, and evolutionary science'.[99] Warren established that Disraeli's cry for a strong and united Church to protect the state from these forces remained consistent with his statements about the role of the Church since 1837. But this has received insufficient acknowledgement in the work of other historians, such as Paul Smith, who dismissed the episode, claiming 'Disraeli was too shallow a theologian and too implausible a lay preacher to arrest the arguments sparked by *Essays and Reviews*'.[100] However ineffective Disraeli's church politics in the 1860s might have been, it is important to recognize their ideological consistency with his religious ideas throughout his maturity. Even before entering Parliament in 1837, he expressed his view that the Church maintained the civilized and morally advanced

[97] Allen Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives and the National Church, 1837-1881', *Parliamentary History*, 19:1 (2000), p. 97.
[98] *Ibid*.
[99] *Ibid*.
[100] Smith, *Disraeli*, p. 134.

character of the nation, and that moral, civil, and religious education were inextricable parts of a wholesome vision for the polity.

> I still am of the opinion that the Tory party is the real democratic party of this country. I hold one of the first principles of Toryism to be that Governmt. is instituted for the welfare of the many. This is why the Tories maintain national institutions, the objects of which are the protection, the maintenance, the moral, civil, and religious education of the great mass of the English people: institutions which whether they assume the form of churches, or universities, or societies of men to protect the helpless, and to support the needy, to execute justice and maintain truth, alike originated, and alike to flourish for the advantage and happiness of the multitude.[101]

To those who had read his novels and knew his political record, Disraeli's speeches at diocesan meetings in Oxford throughout the early 1860s would have appeared unsurprising. To his mind, the political forces which he had decried throughout his career found ideological allies in their religious counterparts: in Warren's words, 'dissenting voluntarism and alien theological liberalism'.[102]

Disraeli had expressed the link between political and religious liberalism as early as 1835, in a speech to the electors of Chipping Wycombe.

> We solicit your confidence as upholders of that Protestant Constitution to which we are indebted for the civil and religious liberty which has long been the boast of Britons, and as opposers of that heartless system of legislation which would degrade the still free, though humbler, subjects of the realm in the scale of society. It will be our object to resist that Liberalism in politics, which it seems, is only another phrase for an attack upon the Protestant Religion and the English Poor.[103]

In re-establishing this link between the dangers of both political and religious liberalism, Disraeli formed a partnership between the Church and the Conservative party. His church strategy in the 1860s relied upon the parish as the primary unit of English community. He aligned his views with those of Samuel Wilberforce, who by that time had become a primary figure in debates over diocesan reform. In his speeches in defence of church rates throughout the decade, Disraeli advocated a return to local, parochial government as a bulwark against

[101] *BDL*, ii, p. 61, Disraeli to Edwards Beadon, 2 July 1835.
[102] Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the National Church', p. 103.
[103] *BDL*, ii, p. 278.

the enlarging and centralizing tendency of politics.[104] He was in frequent communication with archdeacons on the subject of this ideological alliance between conservative politics and Church reform; Archdeacon Bickersteth put their strategy memorably when he claimed, in a letter to Disraeli, 'I can see on every side the proof that where the Church System is adequately administered, the people unconsciously become Conservative'.[105] The parochial system paralleled Disraeli's long held views on local landownership – as a form of religious inheritance – and representation, as well as the social role of the Church in communities. The parish offered the institution where these things came together. In the 1860s, he attempted to put into political practice the ideal vision of the parish and the polity that he had illustrated in *Sybil* in 1845.

Disraeli was not sufficiently invested, however, in the corporate climate of the Church to thrive for long in his alliance with Wilberforce; it was not his shallow theology, as Paul Smith claimed, but his un-sectarian nature that ruined his church cry. When he became prime minister in 1868 and became responsible for a number of church appointments, his thinking on the matter diverged from Wilberforce's. The latter wanted to use preferment as an opportunity to acknowledge and compensate those who had supported them in the proceeding church campaigns, and to strengthen his own moderate wing of church leadership. Disraeli, however, preferred to act in what he perceived as the popular interest of the electorate. To the disappointment of Wilberforce, he made the evangelical bishop Hugh MacNeile the dean of Ripon in 1868. He defended his decision with the claim that if the Church continued to act within its own sectarian interests, 'we may all of us live to see the great Church of England subside into an episcopalian sect'.[106]

We have seen that he made the same arguments two years later in *Lothair*, which mocked the tendency of churches to split into factions at a time of such ideological warfare

[104] *Hansard*, 27 Feb. 1861, vol. 161, c. 1039.
[105] Hughenden MSS 124/3 ff. 40, 42, 46. Qtd. in Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the National Church', p. 107.
[106] Hughenden MSS 157/1, Disraeli to Corry, Aug. 1868. Qtd. in Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the National Church', p. 114.

with theological liberals. The main sanctity of the Church, as far as the State was concerned, remained its constancy and inherently non-sectarian nature, which acted as an assurance against the changing tides of intellectual and political opinion. Disraeli expressed this repeatedly, especially in explaining his decision to vote against the increase of the Maynooth Grant.

> Although, I have always been of opinion, that our Constitution in Church and State has been an union far more beneficial to the State, than to the Church, which, under all circumstances, must exist and flourish from its inherent principle, I shall, at all times, heartily maintain that alliance, since it has become identified with the habits and best feelings of the people, and has, for a long series of years, happily secured to us the blessings alike of orthodoxy and of religious freedom.[107]

Further, Disraeli's attitude and manoeuvring on the 'Irish question' throughout his political career also reflected his belief in the sacred nation and Constitution, as well as his exaltation of the parish as the ideal unit of British society. The most comprehensive account of Disraeli's dealings in Ireland shows that in the pre-Maynooth period, Disraeli founded his criticism of Peel's policy in Ireland on the basis that it was 'a foolish attempt to create identical institutions in the two countries'.[108] The nation and its people had an inherent temperament and their institutional and political blood-types, as it were, demanded attention and accommodation. Indeed, when Disraeli argued against the Maynooth Grant, promoting instead a popular and unified Protestantism, he did so on the basis that state endowments were wrong in the first place. In Warren's words, he portrayed 'the richly endowed Church of England, not as the product of state policy, but as the organic creation of historic circumstances . . . any endowment of the Roman Catholic church in Ireland would produce disharmony'.[109]

Here was Disraeli's vision of the nation as an organic growth, whose institutions provided its life force, and on whose organicism the health of the polity relied. The various

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[107] *BDL*, iv, p. 282, Disraeli to the electors of Buckinghamshire, 22 May 1874.
[108] Allen Warren, 'Disraeli, the Conservatives, and the Government of Ireland: Part 1, 1837-1868', *Parliamentary History* 18:1 (1999), p. 48.
[109] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

humours of the institutional body required tactful harmonizing. Ireland, a unique, limb-like extension of the English nation, had its own physiognomy which demanded care. Thus Disraeli's main dismissal of Lord John Russell's Irish policy in 1847 centred on Russell's affinities with the 'Manchester School' of political economy, rather than any attention to organic national principles which Disraeli advocated. Disraeli made this point in the House of Commons in June 1847 in the debate over Ireland's Railways Bill, in which both he and his colleague Bentinck pushed for the government to construct a railway as a way of creating employment and restoration in Ireland.

> . . . if the question on which we are to go to the country be this, whether it be the policy of this country to adhere to any pedantic application of the principles of political economy, I will meet any Gentleman on that issue, and I, for one, will give my vote against that pedantic application of the principles of political economy.[110]

He continued to decry any policy which attempted to crudely apply English legislation to the Irish situation: 'is our empire to perish? – is Ireland to be lost? . . . because you choose to legislate for Ireland with all the comfortable experience of the borough of Southwark?'[111]

As we have seen, nations were not machines into which formulae could be entered. In his conclusion Disraeli set out the ultimate question facing the government with regard to the governance of Ireland.

> The question is whether we are to be governed by certain conclusions, which I believe a very small minority in this House of in the country will accept as political truths; or whether the wants of the people, both English and Irish, are to be considered – whether, in fact, we are to be animated, when we attempt to legislate, by national sympathies, or whether we are to take refuge in mere dry pedantic political aphorisms?[112]

Governing Ireland, like governing any nation, required an exercise in gauging the spiritual temperament of the people as much as crafting social or economic legislation. Russell neglected to consider the special character of the Irish polity yet again when he wrote his famous Durham Letter on 7 November 1850, repudiating the Pope and the Roman Catholic

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[110] *Hansard*, 28 Jun. 1847, vol. 93 c. 1034.
[111] *Ibid*., c. 1035.
[112] *Ibid*. 1041.

Church in its establishment of a Catholic bishopric in the United Kingdom. In trying to capitalize on popular Protestant sentiment, Russell alienated the moderate Roman Catholic electoral base in Ireland. Disraeli wrote as much to John Manners as they attempted to gauge their reaction to Russell's strategy.

> Assuming that John Russell brings in the partial measure wh: is monstrous, tho' probable, what are we to do, if he carry it? And why shd. he not? The Irish Romanists will be bribed over by the omission of their country, & all the Peelites, I can't but fancy, are pro-papal . . . The papal question will be difficult to deal with, but with courage & prudence, I don't despair of appropriating the sound protestant feeling of the country.[113]

If Russell failed to appreciate the delicate differences between the two nations and pursued a purely expedient political move, Disraeli would practice 'courage and prudence' to appeal to the Protestant feeling he perceived in England.

This is an important context for considering Disraeli's approach to the Public Worship Regulation Act, which he commanded through Parliament in 1874. In a consideration of Disraeli's religious thought, the Public Worship Act is significant as virtually the only religious measure that Disraeli enacted in government. After growing unease about ritualist, 'Romish' practices in the liturgy of many Church of England parishes, Queen Victoria, along with the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and other concerned bishops collaborated to propose legislation that would quell such High Church practices.[114] This meant that early in his premiership Disraeli found himself in the position of dealing with what he called in a letter to Lady Bradford, 'the Church Bill, which is not our child, and of which the fortunes are very obscure'.[115]

Given his repeated and vehement opposition to 'sectarian' attitudes and positioning within the Church, however, and given his emphasis in *Lothair* (1870) on the dangers of fractious religious institutions, how much can we make of his seemingly anomalous action of

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[113] *BDL*, v, pp. 391-2, Disraeli to Lord John Manners, 25 Dec. 1850.
[114] See James Bentley, *Ritualism and Politics in Victorian Britain: The Attempt to Legislate for Belief* (Oxford, 1978) and Garby W. Graber, *Ritual Legislation in the Victorian Church of England: Antecedents and Passage of the Public Worship Regulation Act, 1874* (San Francisco, 1993).
[115] *M&B*, v, p. 313, Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 12 Jun. 1874.

striking down the Ritualists? The answer lies partly in Disraeli's vision of the constitution and Church as delicate institutions that must work harmoniously with the spirit of the polity in order to protect the nation's curse. It would be a mistake to try to glean the character of Disraeli's churchmanship or feelings about doctrine from his involvement in the Public Worship Regulation Act. But that does not mean it said nothing about his religious thought. The spirit of the polity had spoken, and, just as he had argued with regard to Ireland, it seemed incumbent upon the government to hear the cries of its people. Legislation to inhibit ritualist practices appeared necessary to appease not only the public and church unity, but more powerfully, the Monarchy, to whom the issue had become urgent. Protecting ecclesiastical unity and quelling rows acted in service to Disraeli's church vision in *Lothair*, and what he expressed in his correspondence: 'We live in times when Churches should act together'.[116] Indeed, Buckle emphasised Disraeli's attention to the constitutional and institutional balance of the nation in his biography; he claimed that Disraeli 'never failed to recognise the profound importance of the spiritual in human nature, whose historical studies had made him thoroughly familiar with the inflammability of High Churchmen, as shown in Dr. Sacheverell's case, and who had had personal experience in the Irish Church controversy'.[117] Disraeli was 'sincerely anxious to promote the interests of religion in the Church'.[118]

We have no reason to suspect that this was not the case. The Public Worship Act resembled the instincts behind Disraeli's appeal to popular Protestantism throughout the 1850s and 1860s. Moreover, the issues at stake struck at the core of Disraeli's feelings about ecclesiastical governance: only a unified and relatively harmonious institution stood any chance of surviving the perils facing it by the late nineteenth century. Several drafts of the 'Memorandum on Proposed Ecclesiastical Legislation' show the urgency with which Disraeli and the Queen regarded the matter: 'The Church of England is in danger of being greatly

[116] *BDL* viii, pp. 265-6, Disraeli to Lord Campden, 10 April 1863.
[117] *M&B*, v, p. 329.
[118] *Ibid*., p. 330.

weakened by a series of petty disputes, which no existing authority can effectively control or decide'.[119] Disraeli regarded the disputes as indeed petty; the doctrinal foibles over which clergymen battled struck him as narrow and beside the point: the Church's true enemies dwelt in the theories of political economists and scientists. The legislation specified the distinct possibility that,

> There may be some violations of the rubric so unimportant, that it may be doubted whether it would be well to enforce them by severe penalties whensoever a complaint is made. For example, it would be hard to punish a clergyman for complying with the all-but-universal practice of not reading the whole of the long notice of the administration of the Holy Communion.[120]

It is almost possible to hear Disraeli's lack of amusement with regards to the trifling disputes that threatened to clog the logbook of complaints. He had little time for them; not because, as Blake claimed, he cared little for religion itself, but because they did not accord with his understanding the religious principle. His eagerness to enact this legislation is better explained by the manner in which it connected to his understanding of the Church of England as a life-giving organ of the Constitution and especially in this case, the monarchy.

Queen Victoria wrote to Disraeli in March 1874, 'Her *earnest* wish is that Mr. Disraeli should do *as far as he can without embarrassment* to the Government, in *satisfying* the *Protestant* feeling of the country in relation to this measure'.[121] In her continued appeals to Disraeli to hastily bring about the legislation, she emphasized the Protestant nature of the Monarchy. In July, she wrote,

> She is deeply grieved to see the want of Protestant feeling in the Cabinet . . . He [Disraeli] should state to the Cabinet how strongly the Queen feels and how faithful she is to the Protestant faith, to defend and maintain which, her family was placed upon the Throne! She owns she often asks herself what has become of the Protestant feeling of Englishmen.[122]

Such a command from the Queen acted unequivocally in Disraeli's priority system. Throughout his correspondence with Victoria on the subject, he made clear that 'your Majesty

[119] Hughenden MSS., 56/4 B/XII/F/12, dated 1874.
[120] *Ibid*.
[121] *M&B*, v, p. 318, Queen Victoria to Disraeli, 20 Mar. 1874.
[122] *Ibid*., p. 324, Queen Victoria to Disraeli, 10 Jul. 1874.

may rely on his efforts for the advantage of your realm and Church'.[123] Despite his dislike of church bickering, the issue presented itself to him as vital to the sustenance of the nation's most important institutions. This did not make it easy. He wrote to Lady Bradford,

> At twelve today, the Archbishop comes. There falls to me the *hardest nut* to crack, that ever was the lot of a Minister. A headstrong step, and it is not only Ministries that wd. be broken up, but political parties altogether, even the Anglican Church itself. I have no one really to consult with. I can listen to my colleagues, and all they say is worth attention, but they are all prejudiced, one way or another.[124]

Disraeli was to form a significant rapport with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Tait, during the process leading up to the Regulation Act. Tait had written to congratulate Disraeli on winning the premiership – 'May God sustain you and help you to use all your influence for the best interests of the country! – and to describe the state of the impending legislation,

> I trust you may be able and willing to help us. I am sure there is a well-grounded alarm caused by the lawlessness which has spring up of late, and which is due to go on and increase, if we wait for a general amendment of the administration of the ecclesiastical law . . .[125]

It should come as no surprise that when the Queen and her archbishops raised an alarm bell on 'lawlessness', Disraeli would spring into action. Tait continued to write to Disraeli throughout the many drafts and readings of the Bill, speculating on the climate of Parliament and the public, likening it as 'violent a Protestant Storm as that' which followed the Papal Aggression in 1851.[126] Disraeli had also received descriptions from other bishops of the state of unease. Charles Ellicott, Bishop of Gloucester, wrote to Disraeli to keep him abreast of the state of the church.

> I commonly venture to send you at this season an annual letter, which I issue to my Diocese – the last two or three pages of which show a Churchmen's views on things in general. Statesmen sometimes care to see professional aspects of professional matters. So I send you this year's letter.[127]

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[123] *Ibid*., p. 321, Disraeli to Queen Victoria, 18 Apr. 1874.
[124] *Ibid*., p. 320, Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 26 Mar. 1874.
[125] Hughenden MSS. 56/3 B/XII/F/2, Archbishop Tait to Disraeli, 23 Feb. 1874.
[126] Hughenden MSS. 56/3 B/XII/F/16, Archbishop Tait to Disraeli, 8 Jul., 1874
[127] Hughenden MSS 56/3 B/XII/F/1, Charles Ellicott to Disraeli, 24 Jan. 1874.

He would eventually come to regard the successful passage of the Act through both houses on first reading as 'in conception and execution, one of the most successful, as it certainly is one of the most important, events in modern political history . . . and I believe the Church will be immensely strengthened'.[128] He repeatedly referred to it as 'the greatest thing I have ever done'.[129] Perhaps he was aware of the gravity with which other statesmen referred to their own projects of Church reform. With regard to the Clerical Residence Bill of 1802, Spencer Perceval 'approach[ed] the discussion . . . with this alarm, because I do not think there is any one question of internal regulation, and national domestic policy, which is to be compared in importance to the Residence of the Clergy'.[130] Lord Liverpool is recorded to have similarly 'felt he was proposing the most important measure he had ever submitted to their lordships' consideration' when he moved for the second reading of a measure for Parliament to grant £1 million to build new Church of England places of worship and to establish a Church Building Commission to oversee its spending in 1818.[131] This not only attests to the centrality of church questions to political legislation in this period, a fact that has received renewed attention in recent histories. It also adds Disraeli, a seemingly unlikely name, to this scene of religious politics. The Public Worship Regulation Act contributed to Disraeli's most significant priority when it came to the Church: unity. It kept the peace and steered the nation onward in its religious duties.

This chapter has considered the religious ideas embedded in Disraeli's vision of the English nation and constitution. It has certainly not provided an exhaustive account of Disraeli's ecclesiastical politics or time in Parliament. But it has attempted to shed light on the religious themes that found compatibility in his political thinking. All of Disraeli's political actions cannot be explained by religious motivations. Expediency and a love of power played no small role in Disraeli's decision-making process both in leadership and in opposition. But

[128] *M&B*, v, p. 322, Disraeli to Lady Bradford, 5 Jun. 1874.
[129] *Ibid*.
[130] British Library Add MS 49180, f. 91. My thanks to Edward Hicks for this reference, which comes from his research on Spencer Perceval's religion.
[131] *Hansard*, 15 May 1818, vol. 38, c. 709.

it is crucial to remember that all of his political manoeuvring took place within an atmosphere of dynamic religious thought and redefinition. Disraeli believed that he acted in accordance with God's plan for the English nation. Throughout many of his legislative roles, he kept a broad but united Church, allied to the State, and a faithful polity at the centre of his political rhetoric. If he merely paid lip service to these ideas, then it would be difficult to explain why they comprised the pages of some of his earliest, most obscure and unread fiction. It makes more sense to pay attention to the consistencies in Disraeli's religious mind. The notion that many of these consistencies took shape around the idea of a religious nation, a sacred constitution, and a faithful polity is an area for future study.

CONCLUSION

For several years, Theology and History faculties have been busy 'putting the religion back' into various historical periods. This was an intellectual project in which I was eager to become involved; indeed, there were many corners of modern British history ripe for such religious recasting. This study thus began with a burning question, which had crossed the minds of several nineteenth-century scholars with whom I had the good fortune to converse: 'Did Disraeli believe in God? Did he have religious principles?'

It was a fascinating premise. But as the project evolved, I realized that more interesting and more answerable, questions existed. Why has Disraeli been left out of conversations of nineteenth-century theological and ecclesiastical change? Can he be located within the contexts of nineteenth-century religious debate, or did he remain anomalous in his religious thinking? While the question of Disraeli's deepest confessional thoughts – his belief or unbelief in God – would remain mostly inaccessible to me, I realised that even by situating his texts within a dynamic nineteenth-century religious context, I could shed light on a historiographical imbalance that desperately needed addressing.

Thus in the preceding chapters I have attempted to construct a Disraeli whose religious expressions arose out of a complicated political, intellectual, and personal identity. In his contributions to political and religious debates, he often expressed seemingly idiosyncratic views. A notable of example might be his argument in the House of Commons in favour of Jewish Relief in 1847, in which he re-articulated the theology of *Tancred* – that Jews are the exceptional people at the heart of Christianity – instead of towing the safer line of religious toleration. He wrote religious fantasies such as *Alroy* and *The Rise of Iskander*, in which he engaged closely with the Bible and religious themes, but nevertheless left many of his readers – both in his lifetime and beyond – with the impression that he never seriously placed himself as Jewish or Christian in matters of confessional faith. Instead of discarding these ostensibly unusual religious ideas, however, this study has argued that Disraeli's biblical and theological expressions participated in a shifting religious atmosphere. His most

bizarre statements about religion are precisely the ones to which we, as historians, should pay closest attention. That he felt able to articulate his 'unconventional' Judeo-Christian ideas blatantly, in the most public of spheres – fiction and politics – tells us something about the way that the politics of religion changed in this period. When we look closely, we find Disraeli participating in a much wider intellectual negotiation between religious traditions and new ideas and art forms.

This has become especially apparent within the themes that this thesis has discussed. Disraeli contributed to an evolving literary sphere which challenged and transformed the status and authority of the Bible, but nevertheless remained in constant dialogue with Scripture as it redefined morality, personhood, and nationhood. He allied the Carlylean notion of the 'great man' with tropes of biblical kingship. He read, thought about, and discussed shifts in biblical criticism and theology, and tried to imagine how society might remain firmly rooted in faith while accommodating new scientific discoveries and the need for a degree of religious pluralism. He expressed deep connections between the growing discourse of race and the ancient concept of God's chosen people. This represented one of his many trajectories between a biblical idea, and a Victorian one: he situated nineteenth-century racial science within the Judeo-Christian metanarrative of God's creation and unfolding of human history. He did the same for the British constitution, and its land and people. Underneath each of these ideas lay Disraeli's effort to include the British nation in an ongoing narrative of chosenness, stretching back to biblical times.

In bringing these themes to light, this thesis has called attention to many historians' misleading treatment of nineteenth-century religious belief as an epiphenomenal ideology, which historical people might enthusiastically craft and implement for political and personal gains. In questioning this approach, I have not argued that Disraeli never used religion expediently; but I have insisted that religious allegiances and commitments are more complicated in their provenance, and nuanced in their execution, than historians have allowed. Like those who promote the 'lived religion' method in historical scholarship, I have also claimed that religious belief operates by different rules, and is governed by different

motivations, from other types of socio-political values. One's existential assumptions about creation, order, and the role of humanity in the universe, necessarily pervade subsequent valuations about life, people, and society. I hope to have demonstrated convincingly – especially through my discussion of biblical inflection within literature, of race and religion, of Carlylean heroes and chosenness, and of the sanctity of the constitution and land, to Disraeli and others – that in the period in question, religious assumptions remained active in seemingly nonreligious aspects of British society.

Where, then, do we find ourselves? The argument ossified by Maurice Cowling and others – that shaping public doctrine within modern British history remained, in many respects, a religious and existential exercise – suggests that we should challenge ourselves to consider it on these terms. The secularization of many facets of modern history in the twentieth century requires us to continue revising our studies of nineteenth-century religious ideas, thinkers, texts, and identities. I have sought to begin this project in the case of Benjamin Disraeli by identifying some of the main religious themes that surface from his work when we read it with theological awareness: Scripture, race, figurative Zionism, individual and national chosenness, belief over unbelief, and religious nationhood. I have focused especially on areas of his thought that have been discussed on secular terms, but which, when flipped over and analysed, are steeped in religious commitments. I have claimed that this typified a nineteenth-century intellectual space that remained, in many ways, invested in religious understandings of the world. Of course, this study remains far from exhaustive. A deeper analysis of the ways in which these religious ideas found actualization in Disraeli's parliamentary dealings with bishops, and his manifestation of these ideals in legislation, for example, are ripe for future study. I hope to have laid a foundation on which we might begin to ask new questions about Disraeli as a religious thinker.

On 19 April, 1881, Disraeli was buried in an austere ceremony at Hughenden Church next to his friend and benefactor, Sarah Brydges Willyams. The ceremony followed the instructions in his will; he refused a public funeral. Side by side lay two converted Jews, two committed Anglicans, who remained deeply interested in their Jewish religious inheritances.

This portrait stands in marked contrast to the burial of Disraeli's great political rival, William Gladstone, with whom this thesis began. Gladstone, the painstakingly pious one, whose sincerity was never doubted, resides proud and adorned in Westminster Abbey, surrounded by great English worthies. Disraeli, the supposed showman and opportunist, rests in his parish church, next to a friend with whom he shared a significant religious connection. Even in this contrast one sees more in Disraeli's religious mind than historians have suggested. Perhaps it invites us to look more closely at the figure who wrote, 'Sensible men are all of the same religion . . . Sensible men never tell'. The irony of this riddle, of course, is that Disraeli *had* told of his religion. He told a world that chose not to listen.

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