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WHITE THEOLOGY

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FROM HYPER-IMPERIALIST TO SUPER-AFRIKANER: THE DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN A WHITE THEOLOGY

Chris Greyling

The British Israel Movement, or Identity Movement as it is called in America, believes that the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic peoples of Europe are the descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. They are therefore the People of the Covenant through whom God promised to bless the earth. The throne of England is directly linked to the throne of David. When Jesus returns, the queen or her descendant will hand over the Throne to Jesus. There is therefore a direct link between the British Empire or the British Commonwealth of Nations and the Kingdom of God. This very British movement came to South Africa in the early 1920s and had a strong following amongst the English South Africans. Since the 1960s with the process of decolonisation and South Africa leaving the Commonwealth, the movement has lost most of its support amongst the English speaking South Africans, but it suddenly gained support amongst the Afrikaans speaking group. The movement which used to be a hyper-imperialist movement became a super-Afrikaans movement with its members openly designating themselves as belonging to the political rightwing. This article studies the reasons for this change in support.

The British Israel Movement

Brief History

H. Wilkinson Riddle in his *Popular Dictionary of Protestantism* (1962) defines British Israelism as ‘the theory that the British are descended from the Ten Tribes of Israel who disappeared from Jewish history after their captivity in Assyria in 722 BC’. He adds that ‘the theory can easily give rise to Anti-Semitism and tends to be Imperialist in outlook’. Since South Africa left the British Commonwealth in 1961 this very British movement developed in South Africa into a very rightwing Afrikaans movement asserting white supremacy and apartheid. The purpose of this article is to research the development of this movement from its strongly Anglo-Saxon origins to its present anti-Jewish, anti-black, white theology stance in South Africa.

The Scotsman John Wilson is generally regarded as the founder of the British Israel Movement (J. G. Melton: *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 1978, Vol. I, pp. 446–452). He published his theories in 1840 in a

book called *Our Israelitish Origins*. Wilson, however, was not the first to make British-Israelite claims. As early as 1649, John Sadler speculated on this identification between the British and Israel in his *Rights to the Kingdom*. The Canadian Richard Brothers (1727–1824), a psychic visionary, who settled in London in 1780 popularised the idea in the second half of the eighteenth century. He began to publish the content of revelations that identified Brothers as a descendant of King David and he demanded the crown of England. He was found guilty of treason, but insane, and was sent to an asylum. In 1822 he published a book with the lengthy title: *A correct Account of the Invasion and the Conquest of this Island by the Saxons, necessary to be known by the English Nation, the Descendants of the greater part of the Ten Tribes* (D.R. Church: *Agenda General Synod*, 1990: 95). Brothers' ideas caught on with some influential men such as the Orientalist Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, the Quaker psychic William Bryan and the Scottish lawyer John Finleyson. The defeat of Napoleon was regarded as the marked confirmation of Brothers' teachings.

John Wilson, however, is regarded as the founder of the movement. He was the first to emphasize the correlation between the Hebrew word *brith* meaning 'covenant' and the name *British*. All the volumes of *The South African National Message*, the official monthly journal of the British Israel World Federation, South Africa, from its first edition in April 1928 to its last in December 1931, when it was replaced by *The Covenant Message*, carry the same paragraph on the front page, just before the 'Editorial', explaining what British Israelism is. I quote it in full:

THE MOVEMENT IN ONE SENTENCE

British Israel is a Movement which contends that God is fulfilling certain great National Promises as contained in the Bible, and that He is fulfilling them to-day in and through the British Empire.

The Name BRITISH. What does it mean?

'British' comes from the Hebrew word 'Brith', meaning Covenant. Anything associated with the Covenant can therefore be called 'Brith'-ish. In Welsh the same Hebrew word persists ('Beritha'), with the same meaning of a Covenant. Consequently, all members of the Covenant Race, all nations that are part of Israel, are included under the general title of 'Brith'-ish, though in modern times they may be American, Danish, Friesland Hollander, Welsh, Scotch, Irish or English. Thus, also, Brit-ain is the land of the Covenant; Britannia is the Covenant of the Deep or of the Ships. It is in this sense of the Covenant, and in no mere Imperialistic sense that the name of the Federation stands as 'British-Israel'.

The basics of British Israelite theology are quite simple, although a good knowledge of the Old Testament is required to trace the intricacies of their logic. Their basic premise is that Israel and Judah were two separate entities, the former comprising the Ten Tribes and the latter the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. In 722 BCE the Ten Tribes were carried away into captivity by Sargon, the Assyrian. Members of the northern tribes, after escaping from captivity, wandered North into Europe and settled in northwestern Europe, Scandinavia and the British Isles. Jeremiah the prophet is believed to have transported Tea-Tephi, the daughter of King Zedekiah, to Ireland to marry Prince Eochaidh, the Heremon, in 580 BC, thus continuing Israel's royal lineage. James I was the first descendant of this union to reign in London (see chart: *The Heritage of the Anglo-Saxon Race*, n.d.). Different countries of Europe are to be identified with different tribes of Israel. Britain and the United States are descendants of Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and, as such, are particularly blessed (Genesis 48). The tribe of Dan has, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Genesis 49:17, left numerous signposts of their meanderings in the names of places like *Denmark*, *Danhauser*, *Dunkirk* and *Dundee*, and rivers like the rivers *Dan* and the *Danube*. Holland is Zebulon who 'will live beside the sea' (Genesis 49:13), and so we could go on.

British Israelism in America

It is not the purpose of this paper to research the complete history of the movement. Our interest is in the development of the movement in South Africa. Since the American movement, however, had and still has a strong influence on some of the South African movements, it would be worthwhile to look at its American history very briefly.

John Wilson's book was published in America as early as 1850 and found isolated disciples, but *Two Sticks* by M.M. Eshelman (1886) and *Judah's Sceptre and Joseph's Birthright* by Rev. J.H. Allen (1902) became the major books selling British Israelism to the American audience (Melton 1978: 448).

The British Israel movement reached its zenith in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1933 the scattered group of followers held a convention in Detroit which led to the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon Federation of America. Groups affiliated with the Federation could be found around the whole country. From the Destiny Publishers, a large number of books and pamphlets were produced, as well as the monthly *Destiny Magazine*. One of the most important structures created by the movement was Dayton Theological Seminary, which functioned from 1947 until the mid 1950s. In Spokane, Washington the Prophetic Herald Ministry

was formed in 1933 and by 1969 it had 41 radio stations carrying its message from coast to coast. In Minneapolis, Gerka Koch started with Christian Research, Inc. It should be noted that in South Africa, Ryno Opperman's movement is also called a Research Academy. Other movements like the Calvary Fellowship and the True Church also teach that the Anglo-Saxon race is the true Israel (Melton 1978: 446–452). One of the best representatives of the British-Israel teaching in America and in South Africa is the Worldwide Church of God of Herbert W. Armstrong and his son Garner Ted Armstrong and their well-known magazine *The Plain Truth*.

The British Israel World Federation, South Africa

British Israel study-groups were formed in South Africa in the early 1920s. They were bound together in the South African British-Israel Association under the chairmanship of Mr A. W. Marris and their journal was *The Bulletin* which was published for the last time in November 1927. In 1928 the British Israel World Federation, South Africa was constituted with A. W. Marris as its first President. According to the first edition of the new journal *The South African National Message*, published on 7 April 1928, the Federation started with a membership of 180 members. The largest membership was in Kroonstad (21 members), Durban (18 members) and Pietermaritzburg (17 members). Many members of local associations were however not yet members of the new Federation and the new magazine urged local associations and study circles to join the Federation (*South African National Message*, Vol. 1/1, April 1928, pp. 11–12).

In January 1932 *The South African National Message* was replaced by *The South African Covenant Message* under the editorship of A. W. Marris. The headquarters of the movement shifted from Burg Street in Cape Town to Loveday Street in Johannesburg. After sixty years, the *South African Covenant Message* is still being published from Honeydew, near Johannesburg.

The Federation and British Imperialism

The publications of the British Israel World Federation in South Africa are outspoken in their support of the British throne and the British Empire. The editorial of the *South African National Message* of January 1929 puts it like this:

If the Throne of King George is in reality the Throne of Jehovah – and the King himself is a representative of the Most High, then we have a new version of the 'Divine Right of Kings', a version which King George,

'knowing whose minister he is', has interpreted in his life-work more than his predecessors . . . We thank God for Royalty, for Throne and for King.

In the same vein the first editorial in April 1928 states:

We believe in the destiny of the British Empire, nor are we drawn to that modern compromise which refuses to speak of 'The Empire', but prefers the more 'democratic' – and weaker – phrase 'Commonwealth of Nations'. A 'Company of Nations' we are and always shall be, for the Bible says so; but a Company under a Throne, which is its binding link and its crowning glory . . . We believe in the History of our Race and our descent . . . We believe in the Word of God . . . We believe in the Covenant People, by whatever name they are now known. British, Danish, Norwegian, Hollander, Huguenot, Afrikaaner – we recognise these among others as being in an especial sense 'bound by a Covenant with the Almighty' . . . Above all, we believe in South Africa, the place which the white race holds therein, and the place which South Africa must occupy in the Empire . . .

The Annual Report of the British Israel World Federation for 1930 refers to the King 'whom we are proud to honour, not so much as belonging to the House of Windsor as to the imperishable House of David' (*South African Covenant Message*, August 1931, p.5) and the report goes on (p.6) to state twelve 'truths' the British Israelites believe in. The last five of these twelve truths are:

8. That the Throne of David will have no end.
9. That the English-speaking race answers in every part to the marks whereby Israel was to be known in 'the last days'.
10. That Britain is the Stone Kingdom that shall fill the earth.
11. That nationally we cannot be destroyed or defeated.
12. That we are to be a blessing to the world.

'Truth 10.' may need some explanation. Daniel 2: 35 and 45 refer to the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in which he saw a stone rolling down the mountain and destroying the statue he dreamt about. This rock started growing until it filled the whole earth. According to the British Israelites this rock is the British Empire. In the September 1931 issue of the *S.A. Covenant Message* (pp.2–4) an article by 'Franse Hugenoot' explains this. He writes

among others that the Anglo-Saxon Race has produced two mighty branches, the United States and the British Empire and both were growing miraculously, and the 'Daughter Nations of the British Empire, of which our South African people is counted as one' are also growing:

Being of Israel the old Cape Colony soon ran over the wall; over the Orange River into the Orange Free State; over the Vaal River into the Transvaal and Cizambesi territory; and over the Drakensbergen into Natal. These fragments of the old Israel Block grew greater and stronger, until they were finally amalgamated and welded together in the Union of South Africa in 1910, without fear of their ever again becoming disunited. The old Cape Colony is still running over the wall into South West Africa and into all the other British Africas, with a possible Union of the greater part of our Continent under the Union Jack – the United British Africas of the near future, all chips off the old block, the Motherland, Britain . . .

The author is convinced that God was doing great things in and through the Empire 'to which our Africander Nation has the honour to belong. Honour it is, and would to God that we all in our Union of South Africa, Dutch speaking and English speaking, realised it, and lived up to it, and became awake to our high calling as a Daughter Nation of our Empire'.

The British Empire was more than just the Rock of Daniel 2: 35. The Empire and the other lost tribes of Brit-ish (Covenant) Israel, and not the Christian Church, is the Bride of Christ (*S. A. National Message*, 7 September 1931, pp. 1–2). In the Empire God is busy fulfilling His promise to Abraham in Genesis 12: 3, namely to bless him and to make him a blessing to all nations. This God did through the 'Pax Britannica' and through the missionary activities of the Anglo-Saxon and Celtic nations.

The Kingdom for which we are taught to pray (Matthew 6: 10) in its first form is racial – earthly, literal (see Exodus 19: 4), its New Testament form (Genesis 49: 1) during these 'last days' being recognized in the union of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. Into this Kingdom any foreigner may be naturalized. Into the spiritual aspect of this 'Kingdom of Heaven' all may come – for it is 'open to all believers' – by a heart recognition that 'Jesus Christ is the Son of God' (Acts 7: 37). Into its final form as 'the Kingdom of God' it is the union of Church and State – Israel included – into which all the kingdoms will be merged (Revelation 11: 15) (*South African Covenant Message*, April 1931, p. 10).

The British Israelites in the early thirties were looking forward to a day in the not-too-distant future, when the Saxon peoples outside 'Great-Israel-Britain', including America, would be united in one mighty Commonwealth, under the King, the earthly representative of Christ (*South African National Message*, May 1931, p. 4). In his regular Dutch article 'Franse Hugenoot' writes that this reunion of all the descendants of Israel could possibly take place under the then Prince of Wales, who would reign until the time that he would surrender his throne to Christ on His return (*South African National Message*, June 1931, p. 3).

The British Israelites were therefore looking forward to the worldwide expansion of the British Empire. The demand of the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings that 'God save the King' should no longer be the National Anthem of South Africa was therefore seen as a revolt against the covenants of God. God promised to David that there would always be somebody to sit on the Davidic throne. This promise was fulfilled in the Royal House of Britain and 'surely by endeavouring to remove this expression of a nation's faith in the throne, that has been so wonderfully maintained by God in the fulfilment of His word – we belittle the Book we, as a nation, are pledged to protect' (*South African National Message*, April 1931, p. 1).

This strong faith in the Empire, as part of God's plan of salvation, can be read in all copies of the *South African National Message* and in the pages of *The Covenant Message* which replaced it from January 1932. For the purpose of this article we will only refer to some articles in 1960, the year in which South Africa voted to leave the Commonwealth. On the back page of *The Covenant Message* of January 1960 the tenets of the British Israel World Federation are briefly stated. One of these tenets is stated as follows:

It is a basic tenet of the Israel Identity Movement that it identifies the modern development of the House of Israel as being the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic and kindred people. The continuity of the Davidic House, as covenanted for ever with David, is also identified as being fulfilled within the Royal House of Britain. This knowledge is a key, we respectfully suggest, to a clearer understanding of the many hitherto obscure aspects of Holy Scripture . . .

In an article on 'Crown and Commonwealth' (*The Covenant Message*, January 1960, pp. 12–17) Rev. Ansley Rash uses a whole number of quotations from Genesis and Isaiah to prove that the English throne is so firm because 'Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, is seated upon the throne of the Lord over Israel

which she holds in trust for great David's greater Son' and because the Anglo-Celto-Saxon peoples, represented by the British Commonwealth, the United States, Scandinavia and the Low Countries are the only countries in which God's promises are fulfilled into the minutest details.

With references to Psalm 133 and other Scriptures the *Covenant Message* of April 1960 (pp.121–4) warns South Africa not to break away from the Commonwealth, because the Queen is God's Anointed. The anointing ceremony at the Coronation is described in detail to prove that in that way the Queen is 'the Lord's Anointed dedicated to occupy Her Sacred Office on the Davidic Throne and, also, to be Head of the British Commonwealth of Nations'. The article ends with a very strongly emphasised **God Save the Queen!** This plea not to break away from the Commonwealth is also strongly stressed in a lengthy article by J. Hofmeyr ('Republic: Yes or No?', *Covenant Message*, June 1960, pp.210–16) in which she uses the same arguments about the Queen as God's Anointed, the Pax Britannica and the fact that Unity is Strength, to plead for South Africa to stay in the Commonwealth. 'It is not democracy but Theocracy that matters' (p.216).

In a pamphlet *Monarchy or Republic?* published in 1960 the British Israel World Federation argues that both Queen Elizabeth and her husband, Prince Phillip, are rightful descendants of the Davidic house, to whom the throne is promised for ever, and if South Africa would abolish the monarchy, she would 'most thoroughly deserve whatever tribulation is inflicted upon us for having the audacity to flout and question the Word of God'.

The Covenant Message comes out fairly strongly against the whole process of Decolonisation. The June 1960 issue (p.205) warns that:

the world will see, before long, what happens in Africa, as elsewhere, as 'the power of the holy people' wanes, wherever the Pax Britannica, the Peace of Israel, is withdrawn . . . It will certainly produce, in the countries concerned, a growing longing among the ordinary peoples thereof for the return of the Peace of Israel. By then, let us hope, Anglo-Saxon Israel will be willing – and fit – to resume under Christ her rightful King, the responsibilities which she now denies or allows herself to be jockeyed out of.

British Israel spoke out strongly against mixed marriages. In an article on 'Miscegenation' in the October 1960 *Covenant Message* (pp.371–3) the author, Rev. G. H. Nicholson, explains that God has divided mankind into different races and He intends them to remain as such. He has also given us the

strongest admonitions to maintain purity of race and he calls miscegenation 'the root cause of appalling evil'.

To summarise, it could be said that the British Israel World Federation shared views with Nationalist Afrikanerdom about the superiority of the white race and about miscegenation, but that they strongly differed with Afrikaner Nationalism regarding their views on the role of the British throne and the British Empire. To them the Kingdom of God was identical to the British Empire. The Queen is the anointed of God sitting on the throne of David and she and her descendants will rule as representatives of Christ until Christ returns. Decolonisation was a great mistake and part of the work of the anti-Christ. To leave the Commonwealth was treason against God's anointed. The Empire had to be enlarged to include all the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic nations. This could even include Japan because the Japanese Samurai were also from the same stock.

British Israelism and the Afrikaner

The early copies of the *S.A. National Message*, from April 1928 onwards, already carried articles in Afrikaans entitled *Wie is die Afrikaners?* (Who are the Afrikaners?) arguing that the Afrikaners were part of God's Covenant People. Through the Dutch, the Huguenots and the British Settlers they came from the best stock of the Covenant Race. Afrikaners and English are brothers and they must stand together to win the world for their Master (*S.A. National Message*, September 1928, p. 15).

The articles on the Afrikaners were followed by a regular monthly Dutch article by 'Franse Hugenoot' (spelt 'Franse Huisgenoot' in Sept. 1929!). These articles appeared for several years.

It is clear that from their inception these magazines tried to convince the Afrikaners that they were part of the Covenant Race and therefore had to accept their English compatriots as brothers. But this also meant accepting the King and the Empire as part of God's plan of salvation. There is little proof that the movement had any real Afrikaans following in the early years. This was confirmed in interviews with some of the older leaders who were part of the movement in the 1950s. It was a movement based on a white theology glorifying the Anglo-Saxon people, the King and the British Empire. This had very little appeal for the Nationalist Afrikaners, who were dreaming of their own Republic free from British rule. The reaction of the British Israelite leadership when South Africa voted to become a Republic and to leave the Commonwealth didn't help much to keep the Afrikaners attending the Bible Study Groups within the movement. Afrikaners started branching off on their own, publishing their own material.

One of the most prolific authors to spread British Israelism amongst the Afrikaans speaking group is F. W. C. Nesor of Vereeniging. He wrote his *APARTHEID – Wat sê die Skrif* (APARTHEID – What does Scripture say) as early as 1956 and it was reprinted eight times by 1984. The emphasis is on God's predestination. God chose Israel with a purpose and therefore they had to keep themselves separate from other nations. The Anglo-Saxon-Celtic nations are Israel and it is God Himself who brought these people of the Covenant to this southern tip of Africa with a purpose, namely to be a blessing to all nations. 'To fulfil our calling we must remain PURE and guard our IDENTITY' (Nesor: *Apartheid*, p.11). Marriage between Whites and the Black races is national suicide. Political and social integration must of necessity lead to racial integration and that is against the plan and the law of God. 'Let us respect God's clear command in this connection and let us keep the blood of our white race pure' (p.14).

From the middle sixties Afrikaans publications started to use Zephaniah 3: 10 as a hermeneutic key to understand God's purpose with the white nations in Southern Africa. In the N.I.V. translation it reads as follows:

From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshippers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings.

Cush is Ethiopia and the British Israelites started using old maps to prove that 'the rivers of Cush' referred to are the Zambezi, the Kunene, Kubango and other central African rivers. It is then understood to mean that the Israelites, God's 'scattered people' are living south of the Zambezi and that God would gather them from there to bring Him offerings. This then could only refer to the white nations of the then Rhodesias and South Africa. Zephaniah 3: 10 therefore 'proves' the identity of the white nations of Southern Africa. They are none else but the 'scattered people' of God, the Lost Tribes of Israel, protected by God at this southern tip of Africa until the day that He wishes to reveal their true identity.

Kees Post of the Plumstead Bible Study Circle was one of the first to emphasise this 'identity' but he was soon followed by W. G. Finlay of the Federation of the Covenant People – the old British Israel World Federation – in his booklet *Die Grense van 'n Volk* (The Boundaries of a People, n. d.). It was also taken up by N. A. Burger of Newcastle in his voluminous work of 310 pages, *Rigters onder die Suiderkruis* (Judges under the Southern Cross). Other texts were discovered which refer to the rivers of Cush, for example Isaiah 18: 2. This identification became the main theme of Robert Hayes' book

SUID-AFRIKA . . . Die Land oorkant die Riviere van Kus (SOUTH AFRICA . . . The land beyond the rivers of Cush, 1986). The racism of this book was so vitriolic that it was banned. Hayes then wrote *Die Lewendes en die Dooies* (The Living and the Dead, 1990), which is much milder but bears the same message. The identification of the people of 'Black Africa' as the people of Cush and the whites as being the Chosen People south of the rivers of Cush is also to be found in Michael C. Eksteen's book *Die Worstelstryd teen die Wêreldheersers en die Owerhede* (The Struggle against the Principalities and Powers, 1980, pp. 52–9).

In 1981, after clashes with the Presbytery of the D.R. Church in Windhoek and later with the Church Council at Kuruman, Rev. Gert Steenkamp broke away from the Dutch Reformed Church and started his own Church, Die Gemeente van die Verbondsvolk (The Assembly of the Covenant People) which now has six congregations and three fulltime ministers. In their Church constitution called *YAHWEH IS ONS HERDER: Belydenis van die Gemeente van die Verbondsvolk* (YAHWEH IS OUR SHEPHERD: Confession of the Assembly of the Covenant People), the Church distances itself from other Israelite movements who did not subscribe to this confession, warning that there are many 'strange doctrinal winds' blowing, using the name of the Israel Identity movement (p. 1).

In spite of the fact that the Gemeentes van die Verbondsvolk distance themselves from other Israelite groups, the greatest part of their teachings are clearly based on British Israelism. We will return to their teachings further on.

Ryno Opperman, an ardent Israelite, started his Research Academy in Bellville and Mosselbay. Except for his teaching on 'the Sacred Names' which he holds in common with Steenkamp's Verbondsvolk, Opperman is an ardent follower of the American Reconstruction Theology. In an interview he explained that, to prepare the way for the return of Christ, he and his followers had to reconstruct the theocracy, the Rule of God. That meant basically three things: The reconstruction of the *place* of worship, the *offices* of worship and the *norms* of worship. The reconstruction of the place of worship has already begun. They have constructed a temple at Albertinia, near Mosselbay. This, however, is not the final temple. The final temple will be built upon Table Mountain, when Jesus returns for His rule of 1000 years. They have already started reconstructing the Biblical offices of King, Priest and Prophet. He himself is *ha-Nabi*, the Prophet and Dr S.J.F. Weich of Mosselbay is *sar-cohen*, chief Priest. Each area will have a *rosh-cohen* and in the long run, when the full reconstruction is completed, Dr Weich or another leader will

become the *Gadol-cohen*, the High priest. The reconstruction of the rules of office have also begun. Circumcision has been reinstated and no uncircumcised person is allowed to enter the temple in Albertinia. Even the calendar has been changed to re-introduce Mosaic months and festivals. The use of the 'sacred names' of Yahweh, Yahshua, etc. are discussed in K. G. van Aswegen's booklet . . . *en ook die HEILIGE AANSPREEKVORME*, (. . . and the HOLY FORMS OF ADDRESS as well) while circumcision is defended in Dr Weich's two booklets *The 'CUT' of the Everlasting Covenant* and *Die Verbondsbesnydenis* (The Circumcision of the Covenant). Opperman's teachings about the white race as Israel is to be found in his booklet *Oorsprong van die Wit Volk van Suid-Afrika* (The origins of the White Nation of South Africa).

As the Synods of the Dutch Reformed Church started distancing themselves from apartheid and racism, the discontent amongst Afrikaners at the right side of the spectrum started mounting against the D.R. Church. The break-away *Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk* was considered as still too near the Dutch Reformed Church, especially since it still believed in missions. Those who looked for a radical alternative were drawn to the Israel Vision Churches, not only because of their teachings about the white races as being the Lost Tribes of Israel, but especially because of their teachings about the origins of the black races.

The Origins of the Black Races

For the sake of brevity, it will suffice to concentrate on the teachings of the *Gemeentes van die Verbondsvolk* on the origins of the black races. A very brief discussion on their views is to be found in their Creed which is explained on pages 7–9 of *YAHWEH IS ONS HERDER: Belydenis van die Gemeente van die Verbondsvolk*. Articles 2 to 5 explain how Yahweh made Adam and Eve to His likeness, but Eve was physically seduced by Satan. Because of this intercourse between Satan and Eve Cain was born. Satan therefore had physical descendants on earth next to the Children of God. The Adamites are the pure 'Children of God', and the descendants of Cain, and later the descendants of Ham and Canaan, are the direct physical descendants of Satan. The Creed goes on to state that the Bible says clearly that there will be an everlasting hostility between the Children of God and the seed of the snake, of Satan. The head of the snake still has to be crushed.

The whites are of course the Adamites and the blacks the descendants of Ham, the physical descendants of Satan. In interviews it was further explained that the word *Adam* means *red*. That refers to the fact that Adamites can blush,

'and Kaffirs can't blush!' The parable of Jesus about the good seed and the weeds (Matthew 13: 24–30) was also explained from this point of view. *Seed* is taken literally. Jesus said that the good seeds are 'the children of the Kingdom' and the weeds were 'the sons of the evil one' (Matthew 13: 38–9). Understood in the context as explained above it means that God sowed His children, the Adamites, on earth and Satan, because of his animosity against God and to spoil God's harvest seduced Eve, had intercourse with her and in that way sowed his seed in God's fields. Steenkamp therefore rejects violence, because the parable says that the husbandmen should not try to weed out the weeds. The angels of God will do that in due course. 'Die groot skoonmaak kom!' (The great clean-up still has to come!). Steenkamp therefore distanced himself from Eugene Marais, Barend Strydom and Cornelius Lottering who in their evidence pleaded for mitigation because they were influenced by the teachings of the Gemeentes van die Verbondsvolk. These three murder trials were widely covered in the media with headlines like 'Ver-regse sekte beplan terreur' (Far right-wing sect plans terrorism), *Rapport*, 4/11/90, 'Sò preek die dominee: "Stuur my, ék sal die kaffers se koppe teen die mure vashardloop. Laat hulle vrek neerslaan"' (This dominee preaches saying: Send me, and I will smash the kaffirs' heads against the walls. Let them drop dead!), *Vrye Weekblad*, 11/12/89, 'The shadowy sect that spawned a killer' (*Sunday Tribune*, 24/3/91) and 'Maak maar dood – dis diere' (Kill them – they are animals), *Insig*, May 1991.

The Jews

If the white races of Europe and especially their South African descendants 'beyond the rivers of Cush' are the Lost Tribes of Israel, protected in a special way by God here at the southern tip of Africa, what about the Jews?

The publications of the Israelite Vision groups, including the publications of the Federation of the Covenant People after 1960, leave no doubt that they are outspokenly anti-Jewish. They claim that the Bible makes a clear distinction between Israel and the Jews. God's covenants are with Israel. The Jews on the other hand are a mixed race. The descendants of Benjamin and Judah intermarried with the Edomites who were forcefully circumcised in the time of the Maccabean rulers. It is this mixed race that crucified Jesus or Yeshua as He is called by the followers of the Sacred Names Theology. Through the ages this mixed race remained hostile to Christ and Christianity. In the eighth century the Jews were further mixed with the Khazar Turks and most of the people of Israel and the world Jewry are descendants of these Khazar-Jews (Cf. Hayes: *Oorkant die Riviere van Kus*, pp.334–8). One of the greatest modern threats is

therefore the Illuminati, 'the Big Money and the Big Media' with their 'unitary state psychosis' (*The Covenant Message*, 58/1, March 1992, p.29). The Illuminati and the Big Monetary Forces are seen as the real powers behind the whole drive for 'a New World Order'.

The Church of the Creator

The British Israelite Movement must not be confused with the extreme right-wing Church of the Creator. This 'Church' came into the focus of the media when two of its members Johannes Grobbelaar and Jurgen White committed suicide near Noenieput in the Kalahari after a shootout with the police in November 1991. Two other members of the same church, Cornelius van Wyk and Jean du Plessis, friends of White and Grobbelaar, were subsequently detained. They were linked to armed robberies and the theft of weapons from a SADF installation as well as a gruesome murder in Louis Trichardt.

This movement does not have a good word to say about the British Israelites. The founder-leader of this Church, Ben Klaasen, wrote several very strongly anti-religious books, amongst others *THE WHITE MAN'S BIBLE* and *RAHOWA*. The title *RAHOWA* is an acronym made up of the first letters of the words Racial Holy War. In it the Christian Bible is called 'an incoherent collection of primitive, barbaric, dirty Jewish fairytales, a stinking pile of Jewish garbage' and their own religion is described as 'a dynamic creed and a militant programme for the survival, salvation and redemption of the white race'. The Jews and the black 'mud races' are the real danger for the survival of the white race. Their newsletter *Racial Loyalty* is spattered with insulting comic strips about black and Jewish people. How people can be proud to call themselves British Israelites is therefore something to be laughed at. Christians are called 'spook-peddlers' since they put their trust in a resurrected Jew and 'spooks-in-the-sky' which they call God and the Holy Spirit. Because they believe in this spook-in-the-sky nonsense, 'Christians are the poorest of all prospects for building a White racial movement'. The British Israelites, or as they are called in America 'The Identity Movement', are on the other hand, 'another breed of cat', because 'they crave Identity as members of the White Race and are therefore the type of people the White Race needs to save itself. The big problem is they want to keep their hang-up with the Jewish spooks intact at the same time . . . We Creators are sick and tired of putting up with such idiots who will indulge in such obvious insanities, and expect that we will "respect" their "beliefs"' (Ben Klaasen: *RAHOWA! The Planet is all ours*, 1987, pp. 124–37).

Scientific Discussion

1. The development within the British Israel Movement in South Africa is an excellent model for the study of Comparative Historical Hermeneutics. The history of any religious movement can only be understood within the context of secular history. Religious movements are influenced by their historical and cultural milieu. In turn religious history also has an influence on the cultures and ideologies of its time.

The imperialist dreams and ideals of the times between the first and second world wars are clearly seen in the early literature of the British Israel World Federation, South Africa. The Anglo-Saxon-Celtic nations are God's own people, the Lost Tribes of Israel. The King of England is a direct descendant of King David. The promises of God to David are fulfilled in the British Throne and the King and his descendants will rule over God's Kingdom until Jesus, the Greater Son of David, will return. God is fulfilling His Covenant with Abraham through the British Empire and her daughter nations like the United States. They are blessed and are a blessing to all the nations.

This imperialist dream did not have a good reception amongst the Afrikaners. Their nationalism was very much an anti-English and therefore an anti-imperialist nationalism. The teaching that the white nations were the Lost Tribes of Israel would appeal to them, but the glorification of the British Throne ran against their grain. In 1960 South Africa voted to leave the British Commonwealth. For the British Israelites that was treason against the Kingdom. As the process of decolonisation progressed, the English part of the movement started waning and the tone of the articles in *The Covenant Message* started changing. The articles became more negative with a strong anti-Communist and theologically even an anti-Pauline slant. The glorification of the British Throne and the British Empire has completely disappeared.

As the English side of the movement started waning, the Afrikaans Bible Study groups started growing. This process accelerated as the Dutch Reformed Church started questioning the theological basis of apartheid. The Dutch Reformed Church's decisions that apartheid was sin and that the theological defence of apartheid was a heresy came as a final blow. This decision left those who believed in apartheid without an ideological base. The Israelite teaching that the white nations were God's own people in whom the promises of God are fulfilled became very attractive. It was supplemented with new myths about the origins of the Black and Coloured nations and about the racial composition of the Jews and the Protocols of the Illuminati. Bible Study Groups grew into churches. Others started following American Reconstruction theologies by building a temple, re-instituting the Old Testament Offices and Laws, including

circumcision. Following American Dispensational Theology they expect a New Dispensation when Christ will lead 'Israel' to its real Destiny – the victory over all the 'non-Israel' nations and the establishment of His earthly Kingdom with even the possibility of His Headquarters in Cape Town and the new Temple on top of Table Mountain.

2. This movement is also an excellent model for the study of mythology. The word *mythology* must be understood in its scientific sense. A myth is a story which tries to explain the origins of an existing reality, be it creation, the name of a place or the origins of a certain ritual. Hexham and Poewe (*Understanding Cults and New Religions*, Grand Rapids, 1987) maintain that every new religion has its new mythology.

The Biblical history of Israel's deportation into the Assyrian exile led to several modern myths in which the founders of new religions suddenly 'discovered' the whereabouts of the descendants of the 'Lost Tribes'. According to Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, the Lost Tribes are in Afghanistan and Kashmir. According to Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, the American Indians are the descendants of the Lost Tribes. According to the British Israelites the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic group of nations are the descendants of the Lost Tribes. A whole theory is developed of how these tribes moved from Assyria to Europe. Another myth tells the story how Jeremiah carried a princess of Judah to Ireland and how she became the ancestor of the present heirs to the British throne. In South Africa new myths explain the origins of the black races, while other myths explain the reason why the Jews are not pure descendants of Abraham. Mythology is not something of the distant past. Myths are still being fabricated every day.

The British Israel Movement in its early history, its American versions and its South African branches are excellent models for studying the birth and development of myths.

FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

1. For practical reasons, the customary reference methods were not followed. Primary material is referred to in the text, with an English translation of the titles in brackets.
2. The different South African movements are publishing such a mass of booklets, videos and cassettes that an ordinary Bibliography will be of little help. Addresses can be supplied on request.

3. Several Churches brought out reports on these movements. For a theological discussion of these movements, the following Church Reports can be consulted:

Malan, J.S. & Zevenster, E. *Israelvisiedwaling Ontmasker*, Evangelical Reformed Church, Parow, 1991.

Van der Westhuizen, H. G. (ed.). *Blankheid en Waarheid*, a Report to the General Assembly of the Ned. Hervormde Kerk, Kital, Pretoria, 1989.

Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk : Minutes of Third Synod, 1989, pp.503–4, 568.

Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk : Agenda of the Eighth General Synod, Oktober 1969, pp.95–100
4. The following also discuss the movements from a theological perspective:

Marais, J.C. 'Wit Teologie. 'n Begripsverheldering', *Ned. Geref. Teologiese Tydskrif*, XXXI/5, March 1990, 411–16.

Smit, Kobus. 'Swart Ideologie, Wit Ideologie en Skriftuurlike Teologie', *Fax Theologica*, 7/2, 1987, 1–19.

Van Staden, Andre. 'Die Beskouing van F.W.C. Naser ten opsigte van die Tien Verlore Stamme in Gereformeerde Perspektief', unpublished B. Th. thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1985.

Venter, P.M. 'Israelvisie: Destruksie en Dekonstruksie', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 44/2, June 1988, 514–39.

Verhoef, P.A. *Israel in die Krisis*. Pretoria: N. G. Kerkboekhandel, 1967.

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