Charles Peguy once wrote that "politics begins in mysticism; mysticism always ends in politics." This has been particularly true in Jewish history from the time Moses, at God's behest, instituted a corpus of comprehensive religious law that predated a secular state structure. The impending tension between religious and secular elite was acknowledged by the Jewish deity in the biblical story of the anointing of Israel's first monarch, King Saul. In 1 Samuel 8:11-18, God spells out clearly the unreasonable demands that the monarch will make on the Israelites — in effect indicating that the new institution will compete with the system of religious governance already in place. And God was as good as his word. Subsequent Jewish history is a tale of internecine conflict between the puritanical priestly/prophetic establishment and the errant monarchy for the ideological and economic control of Jewish society.

The constant threat of civil war ended with the loss of political sovereignty and the dispersion of the Jews (diaspora) in the First Century after the Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire. The pre-eminent role of religion in Israeli society is indicated by the fact that most of the wars and rebellions that it conducted against adversaries, like the Greeks and Romans, had a religious motivation. In the diaspora, Jewish internal affairs were dominated by Orthodoxy, facilitated by application of the constantly evolving interpretation of the religious law that was compiled in the Talmud. The ghetto system, that limited Jewish presence in Europe to certain enclaves in the medieval era, solidified the hold of the rabbis on society.

---

1 The 1 Samuel passage reads: Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plough his ground to reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maid-servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the Lord will not answer you in that day." The Holy Bible [containing the Old and the New Testament; New International Version]. (East Brunswick, NJ: International Bible Society, 1984), p. 196.
Zionism, an essentially secular project, intending to put an end to Jewish territorial, economic and emotional dislocation worldwide, threatened the regime of Orthodox control. Incidentally, Zionism sought to bring about a “normalization” of the Jewish experience through political sovereignty, preferably through a secular regime, in pretty much the same manner that the ancient Israelites did when they sought a king. 1 Samuel 8: 19-20 records the response of the people of Israel’s to God warning: “But the people refused to listen to Samuel. ‘No!’ they said. ‘We want a king over us. Then we shall be like all other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles.” (emphasis added)

Normalization went against the grain of Orthodox belief since Israel was set apart by God to be the instrument for fulfilling his soteriological scheme in history. In Leviticus 20: 26, God tells Israel: “You are to be holy to me because I, the Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.” Little wonder that the Orthodoxy opposed Zionism with the vehemence that the prophet Samuel did.

The Orthodoxy opposed Zionism on two grounds: first, that the latter threatened to usurp the cherished notion that the corpus of Jewish religious law was capable of governing society. It believed that Zionist leaders were arrogating themselves to be alternative propounders of law in place of the Torah. Second, the Orthodoxy believed that Zionism misunderstood the process of divine redemption, involved as it was in creating the state of Israel through human agency as opposed to a messianic intervention.

And yet, the despairing circumstances of Jewish life in Europe created the need for the alliance between Judaism and Zionism. The latter needed the support of the rabbis for initiating emigration to Palestine, while some religious leaders could see a divine hand in Zionist activity. This link was institutionalized in the fledgling Jewish community in Palestine called the yishuv. The principle of proportional representation adopted in Zionist bodies guaranteed a place for rabbis in all self-governing institutions. Benefiting from Zionist funds, the Orthodoxy built exclusively enclaves that became repository of religious and later extremist values.

The religious parties managed to wrangle exclusive control over matters of marriage and divorce of all Jews; ensure the observance of Jewish dietary laws in Israel and the declaration of Sabbath as a national holiday —all of which were carried over to independent Israel. The secular Zionists, on their part, extensively appropriated religious
symbols and imagery to evoke a sense of mystical awe for Palestine, to initiate immigration and transcend the arduous life in the Yishuv. This close interface between Judaism and Zionism has had many political, legal and ideological effects, culminating in the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by Yigal Amir, a religious radical, who believed he had divine sanction for his act. The interplay of religion and politics in Israel has a great bearing on the future of Israeli society as Judaism plays a pivotal role in the transmission of political beliefs and the nation's attitudes towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.

To that end, this study seeks to understand the various dimensions of the relationship between Judaism and politics in the state of Israel from its inception to the 1990s. The first chapter will address itself to the pre-independence patterns of interaction between "religion and state" as much of Israeli politics continues to be determined by debates and resolutions in the Yishuv. It will allude to the historical emphases of Zionist ideas as well as study the political response of religionists to the onset of modernity. It reviews the existential profile of European Jewry, a majority of whom were observant Jews, and the intellectual matrix within which Zionism emerged. It will consider the contribution of Judaism and its representatives to the Zionist's movement and the secularists response and religion's role in the institution building of the nascent Jewish state in Palestine.

The second chapter will review the constitutional debate which defined the bounds of ideological discourse; profile the political system and the burgeoning institutions that the state inherited from the pre-state period, and then analyze the interaction between religion and state. In the process it will chart the political activity of the religious parties; the ideological issues which clarified and governed Israeli and Jewish identity placing them in the context of the struggle for ideological and political dominance in the polity.

The third chapter will observe the eventful aftermath of the 1967 War, the religionists response, the governing Labor party's reaction or the lack of it, and review the nature of religious Zionism's revival. It will also analyze the phenomenon of the Gush Emunim, the settler movement, which has a major impact on the country's politics with an exposition of its religious thought to illustrate the potentialities of Jewish fundamentalism. The ideological evolution of the Jewish state in the context of the religious assertion in the 1970s will be constant refrain of the chapter. It will also evaluate the nature and role of Israel's "civil religion" and its relationship with Judaism.
In the fourth chapter, we will see how divisions within the Right led to the formation of the radical right which was, for most part, a tacit alliance between secular nationalists and religious nationalists, a process already fleshed out expertly by the Gush Emunim. The assumptions and the political clout of the radical right will be considered against the backdrop of increasing unrest in the occupied territories. It will evaluate the dynamics of the radical right as expressed in the drive for settlements in the West Bank and a penchant for extremism.

This chapter will also consider the changing tenor of ultra-Orthodox politics which had a significant bearing on religious politics in the 1980s. The study will end with a concluding essay, placing Rabin's assassination in the context of Judaism's interaction with the Israeli state and project the conditions within which Jewish religion can serve to unify the nation rather than divide and thus impart hope for a lasting peace in the Middle East.

I have many blessings to count. I am thankful to my supervisor Prof. K.R. Singh for his sensitive disposition, able counsel and the attention and care he devoted to my work. Dr. Gulshan Dietl has been a source of much appreciated encouragement. Dr. Alouph Hareven, formerly of Van Leer Foundation, graciously guided me to the resource materials available in Jerusalem. The staff of the library at the Goldsmith building in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem were particularly kind and helpful. The field-trip to Israel provided by JNU was indispensable. The diligence of Mr. Sahai at the SIS library has helped me out on numerous occasions over the years.

This thesis could not have been completed without the unwavering support of my family. I am thankful to my mother, Sarojini, for all the love and the hard-work that she put in her life so that we, her children, could have the opportunities that we've had. Sunil, brother and my first mentor, has been the Mortimer J. Adler of my life, by introducing me to the 'great ideas.' My appreciation for his counsel needs to be 'passed over in silence.' I am deeply thankful to my sister Susan, for her love and generous financial provision during the last decade, that enabled me to be literally be a 'scholar in residence.' Its been a joy to be in love with Micky. Her loving gaze and affectionate censure are probably what I'll recall most in time about this thesis.
I have had many benefactors to be thankful for. My cousin Uma and her husband Moses; Bharati aunty & Christopher uncle; Suneela & G. Obadiah, have been helpful on numerous occasions. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Joseph & Celine John for their generosity in allowing us to stay in their house and magnanimously eschewing legitimate aspirations. My cousin Dr. Rajkumar, Bonnie and Varaprasad provided the much needed cheer and hospitality in the last lean days. Anil at A.P. Computers continues to astound with his PC wizardry.

The completion of this thesis is the culmination of much prayer and my thanks to all those who upheld me at the throne of grace. I am grateful to the One who answered those prayers; placed all the above blessings in my life and for demonstrating His faithfulness by being the constant ‘hound of heaven.’