

https://dspace.org/

Clashing worlds: religion and state dualism in Jewish political thought

Hovsha, Joshua

2015-08-19
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/18269

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Clashing Worlds: Religion and State Dualism in Jewish Political Thought

Abstract

This study seeks to understand the tension between religion and state within Jewish tradition in light of historical realities, Jewish philosophy and modern religious responses. primary attention will be given to the works of Moses Maimonides, Nissim of Gerona and Don Isaac Abravanel. These scholars have been chosen as they may be regarded as the leaders of three distinct branches of thought on Jewish legal philosophy and political structure. Collectively, these traditions may be viewed as forming the cannon of Jewish political thought in which modern discourse operates. These archetypes of political thought may be identified as Maimonides' unity model, Nissim of Gerona's model of dualism and Abravanel's model of collision.

Attention is then given to reactions by Jewish religious-thinkers to both the emergence of modern political-Zionism in the late 19th century and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The collective phenomena of political-Zionism, its aims and achievements may be seen as a radical departure from the traditional vision of Jewish religious thought. Broadly outlined, the responses to modern Zionism may be labelled as (i) rejection on the part of both the majority of the orthodox and the larger reform movement (albeit for very different reasons), (ii) The Mizrachi movement of religious Zionism based upon pragmatic necessity as outlined by Isaac Jacob Reines, (iii) messianic religious-Zionism as articulated by Abraham Isaac Kook and radicalised by his son Zvi Yehuda Kook. Attention will also be given to Eliezer Berkovits' (2004: 140-141) conception of "a God-Centred Republic" in which modern Zionism is perceived as an opportunity for a return to Jewish national life without messianic implications. These various responses to the Zionist movement draw from the previous traditions of Jewish Mediaeval thought as well as from historical memory within Jewish thought both explicitly and implicitly (Ravitzky, 1998: 12-13; Stern, 2001). The manner in which both the Zionist endeavour and the State of Israel are conceived has broad implications for the status of secular authority within such a state and the level of engagement or distance that it should have with traditional religious authority. As such, a complete theoretical study of religion and state in Jewish religious-political thought must include an investigation into the reception of Zionism as a vital component.