Jewish and Christian Responses to the Holocaust: The Link to Zionism

Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn, that he may heal us: he has stricken, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. . . . He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. . . . For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.

—Hosea 6:1-3, 6

In the midst of the Second World War, Adolf Hitler, leader of the German people, conducted a systematic campaign to exterminate European Jewry. This genocidal campaign was directed at all Jews, on the basis of what was presumed to be a shared racial nature. It did not matter if the Jew was male or female, infant or elderly, culturally assimilated into German or other Western European societies, or set apart by a traditional Jewish dress, speech, or way of life, whether the Jew was secular or religious or even a convert to a Christian church. For Hitler, a Jew was a Jew. All belonged to one racial nature, which he regarded as inimical to the presumed racial virtue of the Germanic or Aryan race.

In Hitler’s paranoid worldview these two races, Aryan and Jew, were set apart, not simply as superior and inferior types of humans, but as opposite ontological species of good and evil. The Aryan was raised above the merely human to the heroic; the Jew was sunk below the creaturely to the pestilent and the demonic. To exterminate the Jew was, in Hitler’s mad fantasy world, to redeem the Aryan from all danger of “contamination” by the forces of weakness, whether mental, moral, or physical, and to inaugurate the Third Reich, the Germanic millennial age of undiluted virility.
This crusade of redemption through genocide almost succeeded. Six million Jews were annihilated. This meant not only more than one-third of the Jews of the world, at that time. It also meant 90 percent of the rabbis and religious scholars of Eastern and Western Europe. The Holocaust pulled up the world of European Jewish culture by the roots. Although individuals may survive from these communities, these communities themselves can never be reconstituted. The more traditional Jews of the Eastern huts were the least likely to escape. Although remnants of this traditional culture may have been transplanted to the United States or Israel, the Holocaust has left a void at the heart of the human community of peoples that can never be filled.

This enormity happened in the “heartland” of Western Europe, the land of Goethe, Beethoven, and Mozart, of Kant, Hegel, and Schelling, of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsch. It happened in the center of the Christian Enlightenment, from which flowed the classics of modern literature and music, philosophy, theology, and biblical studies. It happened with the passive acquiescence or active participation of most Christians in Europe, and with no decisive protest from church leadership, Catholic or Protestant. Many individual Christians sought to save their Jewish neighbors, but official church bodies did not mobilize in protest. Even the Confessing Church in Germany limited its protest against Hitler to the heresy of a Nazi “cultural Christianity” and failed to mention anti-Semitism.¹

For both Jews and Christians of the post-Holocaust period these events throw the viability of their traditions into question, but in quite different ways. Reflection on the meaning of the Holocaust was slow in coming. For almost two decades there was virtual silence from theologians, Christian or Jewish. Even the stories of survivors came slowly and hesitatingly. Elie Wiesel’s first book, Night, was published in Yiddish in 1956 and became available in French in 1958 and in English in 1960.

Jewish Holocaust Theology

Richard Rubenstein

The first theologian to recognize the Holocaust as a major crisis for traditional theology was Richard Rubenstein in the mid-1960s. Rubenstein, a nonestablishment Jewish religious scholar, published After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism in 1966, questioning the possibility of faith in God after the Holocaust. Emil Fackenheim, a German Jew transplanted to Canada, courtesy of British detention camps, who has been writ-
is thus the underside of a Christian competitive relationship to Jewish claims of divine chosenness. Rubenstein would have Jews accept their particularity, but as one particularity among others. Jews are special in the same way that each person claims their own uniqueness. Rubenstein seeks to "normalize" Jewish identity, as one cultural community among others.

In keeping with his Freudian interpretation of collective psychology, Rubenstein views civilization pessimistically. In a subsequent book, The Canning of History, he denies the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Rather, the Holocaust is an outstanding expression of a general trend of modern bureaucratic technological societies and sovereign states. While modernity has brought the human capacity to express arts and skills to a higher level of prowess, it is at the same time perfecting the arts of mass death. Nazi extermination of the Jews is not an expression of the outbreak of irrational passions but rather the perfection of bureaucratically achieved extermination. The danger of the human metropolis is that it will move, more and more, toward this finale as necropolis, the kingdom of objectification and annihilation. To avoid this, Rubenstein speaks of becoming a political conservative who seeks to avoid redundant people in contemporary society whom the state will wish to annihilate.

But, underneath Rubenstein's pessimistic account of history and technological civilization, there lurks the romantic striving to break free and return from historical alienation to nature. It is in this context that he introduced his interpretation of Zionism and the reclaiming of a Jewish state after the Holocaust. The Jew of rabbinic Judaism, with his belief in a transcendent God of commandments and punishments, is the alienated Jew, the Jew in a state of exile or estrangement from embodiment. This self-alienated Jew was the Jew of Diaspora, the Jew in exile among the nations.

But lurking under the ethical Jew, with his self-estranging ethics and punishing God, is the natural Jew, integrated into the rhythms of nature, the seasons, and the life cycle. Much of this natural or "pagan" Jewishness Rubenstein would see as derivative from the Canaanite background of ancient Hebrew religion, which Jewish tradition repressed but preserved in its festivals. The Zionist is the Jew who has returned from exile, not only in the political sense of statelessness, but also from exile from "his" own natural embodiment. (Rubenstein's thought is androcentric, so we have followed his male generic language here.)

The Zionist is restored both to his relationship to his sexuality and to his community, rooted in his historical homeland. He (she?) has returned to the bosom of his particular part of mother earth from which all come and all shall return at death. Rubenstein's views seem to have been influenced by
the “Canaanite” movement among Israelis. The Canaanites claimed to be, not Jews, but Israelis as a national ethnic identity. Israeli dance and folk music represent this reintegration of the Jew with his nonnational collective embodiment in Israel.

Rubenstein goes on to suggest that the real deity that exists is not the Lord of history but rather the cosmic matrix, the void of nothingness from which all things spring and to which they return at death, the nonethical God(ess) of natural fertility. This idea coincides with Rubenstein’s description of himself as a “Catholic” Jew rather than a “Protestant” Jew. For Rubenstein, what binds him to Judaism is not its ethical commandments but rather its priestly or cultic side. These are the collective rituals that bind the community in collective solidarity, not to solve the human dilemma of ultimate meaninglessness, but rather to share it together, and thus to comfort one another in a common affliction.

This celebration of the Zionist as the natural Jew rings a little hollow. Israel as a Spartan society of ever-redoubled militarism and repressive concern for “national security” looks more like Rubenstein’s fears of the death machine in the modern sovereign state, rather than the happy Hebrew peasant, dancing at the harvest festivals. One wonders if Rubenstein fails to realize how closely his own romantic vision of the release of the natural Jew corresponds to the Nazi dream of the release of the natural German, once the alienating urban Jew was cleared out of the picture. In 1930s Germany, the dream of return to spontaneous, nonetheological culture masked the very different reality of the death machine. Rubenstein’s dream of folk Judaism seems to be an integral part of a similar contradiction.

**Emil Fackenheim**

Although Emil Fackenheim agrees with Rubenstein that the Holocaust has created a crisis for traditional Jewish theology, he vehemently disagrees with Rubenstein’s Freudian methodology and his demythologizing of Jewish chosenness. For Fackenheim it is a blasphemy to say the Holocaust is simply one expression among others of “tendencies of Western civilization in the twentieth century.” Fackenheim rejects comparisons between the Holocaust and other modern evils, such as Hiroshima, Vietnam, or black enslavement. Auschwitz was an evil of a different order from any other human evil. It is evil without remainder or purpose, evil for evil’s sake. It stands out beyond all other relative human evils as unique, absolute.

This means for Fackenheim that the Holocaust also calls the Jew back to Jewish uniqueness and particularity, from all attempts to be assimilated into generic universals. Jewish faith must be rebuilt by reclaiming a primary commitment to this Jewish unique status of chosenness and its ongoing continuation. It is by committing oneself to raising Jewish children after the Holocaust that one reaffirms one’s Jewish faith in the ongoing life of the people Israel. By raising Jewish children one refuses to give new victories to Hitler.” This commitment carries over to the collective life of the Jewish people. It is by committing oneself to the defense of the State of Israel that one commits oneself to Jewish survival as a nation.

Through these commitments to ongoing Jewish life, familial and political, one can also reaffirm faith in the eclipsed face of God. One can redeem God from the abyss of Auschwitz by affirming faith in Jewish survival. Auschwitz overcame all distinctions between the religious and the secular Jews. All Jews who commit themselves to ongoing Jewish life witness against Satan. They witness against the triumph of evil and death over life and hope and hence implicitly prove that the bond between God and the Jewish people is stronger than Satan. Fackenheim does not dispute Rubenstein’s assertion that one cannot construct a theodicy of the Holocaust itself. But he believes that Jews can rebuild faith in God and hope for the victory of life over death through human redemptive acts.

In an essay entitled “The Holocaust and the State of Israel: Their Relation,” Fackenheim constructs a theological relationship between these two events that he would see as total and unbreakable. This is not a causal nexus between the two events. Fackenheim does not suggest that the State of Israel happened “because of the Holocaust,” either in the sense that God allowed the State of Israel to redeem Israel from the Holocaust or that the world community did so out of remorse or pity. Rather, the bond between the two events is established by the overwhelming and continuous response of Jews themselves, whose commitment to the State of Israel is their negation of the threat to their existence posed by the Holocaust. Fackenheim makes this relation total and exclusive. He says “The heart of every authentic response to the Holocaust—religious and secularist, Jewish and non-Jewish—is a commitment to the autonomy and security of the State of Israel.” Presumably this means that any Jewish and Christian response to the Holocaust that is not focused on the autonomy and security of the State of Israel is inauthentic.

Fackenheim sees the founding of the State of Israel as “the beginning of the dawn of our redemption.” In traditional rabbinic thought the Jewish people would only be restored in their homeland by an act of divine intervention in history, by the coming of the Messiah. Fackenheim concurs with those modern Jewish thinkers who reject this distinction between human
effort and divine action. Human effort can, in effect, overcome divine inaction and make a beginning of redemption within history. The heroic efforts that have gone into founding the state cannot be explained simply by human causation within ordinary historical developments. There is a miraculous element of these events that could do such deeds as reunite a people scattered all over the world and rent apart by cultural gaps of centuries, revive an ancient language as a national language, and create self-government and self-defense in the face of overwhelming odds. These heroic acts are, for Fackenheim, an indication that Zionism represents a human will "in touch with the Absolute."  

Fackenheim creates a direct and dangerous symbolic relationship between Jewish resistance to the revelation of the demonic in the Holocaust and their present resistance to the Arabs, who would deny them their security and their state. In Fackenheim's language the Arabs are turned into Nazi surrogates. By fighting the Arab "enemies" of Israel, one fights the Nazis. He paints two pictures of the Jew in the face of the absolute evil of the Holocaust. One is the calm, dignified rabbi who insists on praying Kiddush Hashem for his flock before the Nazi began to shoot them in their mass grave. The second picture is that of a butcher who leaped out of the grave and sunk his teeth in the throat of the Nazi officer and hung on until the Nazi died. These two pictures represent redemptive acts that are complementary to each other, the one of a transcendent goodness in the face of absolute evil, the other of absolute will to refuse to let evil triumph.  

For Fackenheim, the Israelis represent the collective will of the butcher who has leaped out of the grave, while the Arabs have become the surrogates for the Nazi officer into whose throat they sink their teeth. In them, Jewish powerlessness is overcome, and Jewish redemption begins. In 1943, Mordecai Anielewicz, a leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, perished in the flames with the satisfaction that Jewish passivity had been breached and Jewish self-defense had begun. A kibbutz in Israel was named for him that same year. Five years later a small group of members of Kibbutz Yad Mordecai held off an invading Egyptian army in a battle critical for the survival of the Jewish state. Thus does Fackenheim make the direct connection between the Warsaw uprising and the battle against the Arabs in 1948. The spirit of the leaders of the Warsaw ghetto has risen and is present in the members of the kibbutz defending their state against the Egyptians.  

This transference of the unsuccessful resistance against the Nazis to the contemporary conflict with the Arabs represents a dangerous mystification of the issues involved in the State of Israel and its conflicts with the Arabs. By making the Arabs the surrogates of the Nazis, defined as revelations of
Irving Greenberg

Irving Greenberg was director of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership and later became chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council. Greenberg wishes to synthesize radical insights about the crisis of God-language and human responsibility for redemption, found in Rubenstein and Fackenheim, with more traditional Jewish religious language and with the ethics of American Jewish liberalism. Greenberg speaks in the calm, judicious tones of one who wants to bring the best of everything together in balance. He speaks for an American Jewish establishment that has increasingly moved from a progressive to a neoconservative stance in domestic and foreign politics.

In a major address given at the International Symposium on the Holocaust held at St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York City, June 3–6, 1974, Greenberg discussed the challenges to both traditional Jewish and Christian theology from the Holocaust. Both Judaism and Christianity, he said, were religions of redemption. Both hope that the evils of human history will be finally overcome by divine salvific action. Both base their hopes that goodness and life will win over evil and death on foundational paradigms of redemption in the past that shape subsequent ways of life and self-understanding.

For the Jews, the foundational paradigmatic event is the exodus from slavery in Egypt and the giving of the covenant on Sinai. For Christians, it is Easter, the revelation of the resurrection of the Crucified One. In the light of Easter, the crucifixion becomes not simply a meaningless evil but a divine act of atonement for sin. Both religions insulate themselves from further revelations or crises in history by living between this foundational paradigm and their expected fulfillment in the messianic deliverance at the end of history. The Holocaust challenges these Jewish and Christian strategies of insulation from history. For Jews, the Holocaust threatens the basic faith in a God who has entered into a permanent covenant with the Jewish people. There can be no covenant if there is no covenant people. There can be no God of the covenant if that God would will or allow the covenant people to be exterminated.

An even more devastating challenge is given to Christianity by the Holocaust. For Christians have not been innocent victims but collaborators with the Holocaust. Christianity was the major root of that “teaching of contempt” for Jews and Judaism that was translated by Nazism into secular terms as anti-Semitism. Christianity claimed not only to hope for a deliverance from evils in the future messianic advent, but to already have experienced its foundations in Jesus. To say that Jesus is the Christ is to say that we already have received the down payment on messianic times. But a Christianity that not only produced individual Christian sinners, but that, collectively, could be a prime source of genocide for the Jewish people has perhaps lost the last shreds of credibility in its claims to be a beginning of messianic fulfillment. It has been revealed as a font of new evils, rather than of human hope.

Greenberg also perceives in the Holocaust a challenge to modern secular messianisms of the Enlightenment, scientific rationality and liberal universalism. All these secular gods of modern civilization failed in the death camps. The claims of progress through scientific rationality turned out to be a mere mask for racist destruction of a despised people. Science provided the tools of mass murder. Nor did world Jewry rise to the occasion, but everywhere Jews outside of Europe proved more concerned about their own well-being in their own countries than with the fate of their brothers and sisters in Europe.

The failure of human projects of redemption, whether religious or secular, points also to an absence of the divine presence in our experience. We live in a time of the silence of God. For Greenberg this does not mean a denial of God’s existence. Here Greenberg speaks more in the mystical Jewish language of Elie Wiesel than the demythologizing language of Rubenstein. We have entered into a profound religious silence that no longer knows how to speak adequately about God. In the light of the Holocaust, all our past assertions about God and how God is acting in history have become questionable.

For Greenberg, new tentative ways of speaking about God must grow experimentally from human redemptive acts. Greenberg speaks of this cautiously and not with the absolute tones of commands issued from Sinai assumed by Fackenheim. Humans must show by real actions on behalf of life that faith in human goodness is possible. Through building up the signs of commitment to life, one may begin to believe that there is a divine life and goodness that is stronger than human evil and violence.

Greenberg sees commitment to the State of Israel as one such sign that hope is possible. It shows not only that the Jews arose from the Holocaust to affirm their collective survival, it also brings a closure to those efforts to snuff out Jewish collective life that began more than nineteen hundred years ago, with the Roman defeat of the Jewish national uprisings and the destruction of Jerusalem. Unlike Fackenheim, Greenberg wishes to balance Jewish particularity and Jewish universalism, the concerns of the State of Israel and the concerns of the Jews of the Diaspora. Jews today, together with all human religious cultures, must seek to overcome those denigrating
stereotypes that deny full and equal human dignity to others. "This is the overriding command and essential criterion for religious existence today." Whoever joins in the work of the creation and rehabilitation of the image of God in one another, by implication, also rehabilitates the presence of God in the world and in history."

In subsequent writings, Greenberg has developed what he calls the "third age" of Jewish history that begins with the Holocaust and the State of Israel. The first age of biblical Jewish history was one of the direct presence of the voice of God in the midst of his people. The second rabbinic age was one of a mediated presence through the Law and the teachers. The third age must be one of holy secularity. Jews, having overcome their powerlessness, claim the power to assure their own survival. At this point Greenberg begins to sound like a Niebuhrian political pragmatist. He says that the possession of political power can never provide perfect moral virtue. Jews need to adapt themselves from utopian expectations to pragmatism and ethical ambiguity in pursuit of their justifiable goals. Sometimes it is necessary to use immoral means for moral ends. (One wonders what he means by this: the bombing of civilians in refugee camps?)

Greenberg speaks of secular monuments to Jewish life replacing religious ones; the new temples are Yad Vashem (memorial to the victims of the Holocaust) and the Diaspora museum in Israel. In the United States, Jewish agencies supplement the synagogue as expressions of the Jewish community assembled together. Greenberg accepts the close alliance of the foreign and domestic policies of these Jewish agencies with neoconservative American policies. He says that Jews should approach all policy questions by asking, Is it good for the Jews?—and should assert their group self-interest without apologies and without illusions." Greenberg declares that Palestinians can be allowed national sovereignty over their own state, only in the distant future, if they manifest their intention to live in peace with the Israelis over an extended period of time.

As Marc Ellis, a progressive Jewish theologian, has put it, Greenberg seems to have adopted an obfuscating religious language for American and Israeli Realpolitik. To assume that such policies are signs of global redemption is to assume a Western colonialist posture toward Palestinians and Third World peoples' desires for self-determination. White Westerners apparently are able to use power responsibly, while Palestinians, Africans, and Latin Americans need to be kept under the guardianship of their superiors and only allowed internal self-government in their "homelands," while their external political and economic affairs are controlled by those who have assumed the "white man's burden."

Jewish and Christian Responses to the Holocaust

For Greenberg, Palestinians are not Satan. But they are reduced to undisciplined children who can be allowed some rights to the extent that they learn to control their irrational outbursts of temper. One would never guess from such paternalistic language that there were issues of justice involved.

Christian Holocaust Theology

Christian responses to the Holocaust were even slower to develop than Jewish ones. Moreover, in contrast with the Jewish community, those Christians who have made this a central theme of their thought remain isolated individuals. It is true that church bodies, both Catholic and Protestant, have felt the need to respond collectively to the Holocaust. As was seen in the previous chapter, at the Second Vatican Council, a document on the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church and the Jews focused on rejecting the concept of deicide. The death of Jesus was said to be the responsibility of some Jewish persons (as well as Gentiles) in the first century. This does not connotate any collective guilt of the Jewish people, either at the time or in ongoing history."

Protestant responses have focused on the question of mission to the Jews. This was central to the statement of the German Evangelical Church that appeared in 1975. This statement confessed the historical complicity of Christianity with anti-Semitism. It pledged to oppose anti-Semitism, including that anti-Semitism that assumes the form of anti-Zionism. Support for the independence and security of the State of Israel was declared to be, not simply the recognition of a human need and achievement, but an event in the salvation history of the people of God. But the statement stopped short of full rejection of a superior salvific status for Christianity. By implication, Jews remain religiously inferior as long as they have not responded to the revelation of Jesus as the Christ.

A number of denominations have developed statements on Jewish-Christian relations and also have developed programs to purge their denominational, liturgical, and catechetical material of anti-Judaism. Yet, despite these gestures, the issue cannot be said to have become a deep concern for Christians, as it is for Jews. Those theologians who have taken up this issue as central for their theology are exceptional, rather than representative of their church communities. Three such figures will be discussed: A. Roy Eckardt (together with his wife, Alice), Franklin Littell, and Paul van Buren. These figures have been selected because they have made a revised
relation of Christianity to Judaism in the light of the Holocaust determinative for their whole theological enterprise (van Buren more recently so, while Littell and the Eckardts have been working on this concern since the 1960s).

For Jews, the central theological question posed by the Holocaust is theodicy—the question of divine justice, or whether it is possible to speak of a just God working in history after the Holocaust. The question for Christianity arises from Christian culpability for almost two millennia of anti-Semitism, which fed the hatred and indifference that made the Holocaust in “Christian” Europe possible. If Jews, or some Jews, ask about the silence of God, the failure of God to act to save his people, Christians must ask about the silence of “man,” specifically Christians, who not only failed to act to save their Jewish neighbors, but, in many cases, aided and abetted the violence.

Some more Orthodox Jewish theologians, such as Eliezer Berkovits, would say that the question raised by the Holocaust is not “where was God?” but “where was man?” Berkovits would explain the possibility of radical evil in history by a voluntary withdrawal of divine omnipotence in God’s act of creation, which makes possible human freedom and choice. Thus the Holocaust is an extreme example of humanity using its freedom to make the evil rather than the good choice, but it does not disturb the fundamental framework of Jewish understanding of God.

However, for Christians, this question of human culpability is more radical since it is also a specifically Christian culpability. Most Nazis were not Christians, but neopagans. But their neopaganism was rooted in and fed upon a European Christian background of scapegoating the Jews as the “cause of our misfortune.” It is this Christian background of a religious anti-Judaism, translated by modern racists into anti-Semitism, for which Christianity must take responsibility. Christians must ask whether there is not a deeply buried, false theology, going back even to the New Testament itself, that has constructed Christian relationship to the Jews and Judaism in a hostile and antagonistic way.

Is it possible to excise the roots of this Christian anti-Judaism without pulling up foundations of Christian faith itself? As Faith and Fratricide puts the question, is it possible to affirm that Jesus is the Christ without, at the same time, proclaiming a negative and supersessionary relationship to Judaism as the “old” faith that has failed to accept its own transcendence? If, as was argued in that volume, Christology and anti-Judaism are interwoven, not only recently, but within the New Testament itself, then anti-Semitism cannot be dismissed simply as a product of an ancient or modern “paganism.” Whether or not some forms of ancient or modern paganism were or are also anti-Jewish is not the central issue here. But rather, Christians have to take responsibility for a particular kind of anti-Judaism, rooted in a Christian rivalry with Judaism and a desire, simultaneously, to inherit and supersede God’s election of the Jews.

This anti-Judaism cannot be regarded as unrelated to political and racial anti-Semitism because it was originally religious, rather than racial. This religious rivalry was translated in Christendom into a series of ecclesiastical and imperial laws that segregated Jews into a despised status in Christian societies. It is the twenty centuries of hostility to Jews, incarnated into political and social systems in Christian societies, that is the background of modern political anti-Semitism. Thus Christian anti-Judaism is a matter not simply of theological “ideas,” but of ideas that have borne hostile social fruit for two millennia.

Christian affirmation of ideals, such as Jesus’ status as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic hope and the church as the “New Israel” that supersedes God’s covenant with the Jews, is integrally intertwined with a Christian teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism. This theological revision is not simply a matter of abstract “ideas,” but rather of ideas that have consequences. For example, if Christianity takes seriously that God’s covenant with the Jews has not been superseded by Christ, and that the Torah continues to be the expression of Jewish faithfulness to God, then it cannot continue to organize programs of evangelization of Jews. Christianity must relate institutionally, not just as individual Christians, to institutional Judaism as a religion having its own salvific efficacy. It is not in need of Christian evangelization in order to come into a fullness of relationship to God.

Although there are many critical aspects of this rethinking of Christian identity that are implied by such a shift in relationship to Judaism—aspects that were delineated in the last chapter of Faith and Fratricide—these pages we will focus on one particular question that was only slightly touched upon in that book. To what extent does a Christian rethinking of its identity necessitate, theologically, a partisan support for the State of Israel, as a Jewish state? This question was not addressed in the earlier book because, at that time, it was not apparent that anyone would draw such a connection between Christian rejection of anti-Judaism and partition support for the State of Israel. It was assumed that the implications of a Christian critique of anti-Judaism pointed primarily toward a reevaluation of Christian-Jewish relations as religious systems; Christians needed to move from a supersessionary to a peer relation between Christianity and Judaism, as religions of salvation of equivalent value.

Such a conceptual shift in relationship between Christianity and Judaism as religions would have political implications. It would imply equal rights of Jewish organizations with Christian ones, as well as of Jewish persons with
Christians within pluralistic secular societies. However, it was not evident that this implied that Jews should also be seen as a nation that had a unique right to have a Jewish nation-state (Jewish in both the ethnic and the theocratic sense). This was and is a kind of nationalism that we reject for Christianity, or indeed for any religious-ethnic group.

However, it has become apparent to us that many Jews now assume that Jewish identity resides, not primarily, or even at all, in a religious-communal identity, but rather in a national-ethnic one. For them this national-ethnic identity is to be expressed normatively in a Jewish state. Not to accept the Zionist Jewish state, therefore, to reject the core of Jewishness. For anyone, including Jews, to be anti-Zionist is to be anti-Semitic. Thus, it is becoming less and less possible to differentiate between a religious and civil libertarian rejection of anti-Semitism and the endorsement of a Jewish state. It is said that anyone who wishes to purge himself or herself of anti-Semitism must be pro-Zionist.

The three Christian theologians whom we have selected to discuss in this chapter have concurred with this fusion of Jews as a religious community and as an ethnic-national one. They have accepted the thesis that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism.

**Roy Eckardt and Alice L. Eckardt**

Roy and Alice Eckardt have expressed their views of a necessary Christian Zionism, in response to the Holocaust, in several volumes, such as *Long Night's Journey into Day: Life and Faith after the Holocaust* (1982) and *Jews and Christians: The Contemporary Meeting* (1986). For the Eckardts, a full and adequate Christian response to the Holocaust necessitates a revolutionary revision in Christian theology. All notions that Judaism has an inferior moral or salvific content vis-à-vis Christianity must be rejected. This means rethinking the basic interpretation of the resurrection and Jesus' status as the Messiah. Jesus cannot be said to have risen from the dead in a physical sense (and there is no other way to interpret this original Christian assertion) or to be in an already achieved messianic status, because the world is unredeemed. The Eckardts take seriously the Jewish tradition that the coming of the Messiah does not refer to simply a changed spiritual relation to God, but to the total salvation of the earth from evil. Since this obviously has not happened, it is not possible to say that the Messiah has come. Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Christ is not unfaithfulness, but faithfulness to God. It means that Jews remain faithful to the one covenant that God has made with them. They continue to hope and work for a future redemption that has not yet come.

For the Eckardts, this unification of the religious and the political, which they see as a central Jewish insight that Christians need to learn from their Jewish "elder brothers," also has implications for a Christian support of Israel as a Jewish state. The Eckardts do not wish to make absolutist claims for a relationship of Jewish peoplehood to a divinely given land in Palestine. They would assert that no people has an absolute claim to anything. All human claims to states or land are partial and relative. They would particularly reject the fundamentalist type of Christian Zionism that assimilates a Jewish return to the land with a Christian dispensationalist eschatology. They characterize such a theology as ultimately anti-Semitic, since the Jewish state is celebrated only as a step to final Jewish conversion or annihilation.

While seeking to avoid a "territorial fundamentalism," the Eckardts nevertheless characterize any criticism of Israel, from either the Arabs or Christian peace activists, such as the Quakers, as anti-Semitic. It is motivated by a fundamental hostility to Jewish self-determination. They assert that "the worst fate that can befall any people is to be bereft of political sovereignty." Jews have a right to a state because every people has a right to political self-determination. To reject a Jewish state thus is rooted in an anti-Semitic ideology that believes that Jews, of all the peoples of the world, are to be raceless and powerless wanderers among other people and are not to have a home (state) of their own. Thus, for the Eckardts, Jews do not have a special God-given right to a state above other people. They have the same right as every people to a state. This is the fundamental base for defending one's existence against hostile enemies.

However, the Eckardts fail to examine carefully whether such a universalistic identification of every ethnic group with an autonomous nation-state is really realistic or desirable in a world where forced or voluntary migration patterns have diffused ethnic groups and mingled them in the same territories. They compare the Jewish right to self-determination with the Black Power movement in the United States, failing to notice that black Americans are not asking for a separate black nation in some autonomous territory within North America. Nor are they asking to return to found an Afro-American state in Africa (this was already done in Liberia with consequences somewhat analogous to Zionism). Rather, they are asking for equal civil rights within an ethnically pluralistic state, where being an American is not construed to mean membership in a particular religious or ethnic-racial group.

If all peoples should have political sovereignty, then one should imagine that the Eckardts would also support a Palestinian state. However, they refuse to draw this conclusion from their universal principle of the right of every people to national self-determination. They do so by using selective
and biased information about Palestinians. Palestinians are said to already have a state, which is the state of Jordan, so they don't need a state. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights are ignored completely, and Palestinians within Israel are said to already have full and equal rights with Israelis (which, of course, is not the case). So the only "Palestinian question" is that of Palestinian refugees in other Arab areas, such as Lebanon and Syria. Their prolonged refugee status is caused entirely by Arabs who have "manipulated" the "Palestinian problem" to foment hostility to Israel. Presumably the solution to the problem of these Palestinians is to be allowed to move to Jordan.

Franklin Littell

Franklin Littell has developed his views of anti-Zionism as anti-Semitism in a number of writings. His *Crucifixion of the Jews* is representative of his perspective. Littell's earlier book, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (1952), established him as a major advocate of the free church tradition of ecclesiology. Any unity of church and state is an apostasy to the authentic understanding of the Christian church as a counterculture that must stand as a prophetic critique of all worldly power systems. The church is a community set apart from the state as witness to an alternative redemptive lifestyle of the kingdom of God, characterized by pacifism, egalitarianism, and communal sharing.

Littell brings this free church critique of Christendom to his battle against anti-Semitism in the Christian tradition. Christian failure to reject Hitler is a radical instance of a "culture Christianity" that sells out the gospel to a pagan nationalism and idolatrous sacral state.

However, these free church principles come out oddly when confronted by what Littell sees as a necessity to support the Jewish state in order to be fully affirmative of Jewish identity. Jews in medieval and Reformation Europe were a people set apart, without power in Christian theocratic states. He can readily identify this type of Jewish life with his free church principles. Such Jewish communities are an analogous type of "counterculture," witnessing to redemption apart from existing political systems. Indeed, Christianity should have seen this Jewish counterculture within Christian states as a faithful witness to what the church was supposed to be.

However, Jews in a Jewish state are obviously not a counterculture within that state but rather a fusion of religious and ethnic identity with a state. Israel is a quasi-sacral or quasi-theocratic state, exactly everything Littell supposedly opposes for Christians. Littell covers up this contradiction in three ways. First, he scores any criticism of Israel, whether from Arabs or from Quakers, as anti-Semitism. Like the Eckarts, he identifies any opposition to a Jewish state as a lingering expression of an ideology that decrees misery and powerlessness for Jews as normative. Jewish power or self-determination is seen as a threat to this Christian prescription of Jewish misery.

Second, he identifies Jewishness with a social, historical community, not just a "spiritual identity," scoring what he sees as a false Christian spiritualization of peoplehood. He then identifies this idea that Jews are a community with having a state of their own. Unlike the Eckarts, Littell is willing to give a special or unique status to this Jewish right to a state. It is not simply that every people should have a state, but rather that the Jewish people uniquely have a right to a state on a particular, God-given piece of land. This expresses a special promise of God to the Jews. God chose the Jewish people as an ethnic community and promised them a land. Thus an identification of peoplehood and land are unique to the Jews. While a sacral ethnic state would be wrong for everyone else, it has been mandated by God for the Jews. The Jews are set apart from all other people as the only people whose ethnic identity is mandated by God and who have been given a land in which to express this ethnic identity.

Third, Littell simply ignores the Palestinians. All objections to the State of Israel from the Arab side are presumed to be motivated by baseless hatred. It is even suggested that the presence of the Jewish state challenges Islam, since Islam represents an extreme example of a sacral political order that fuses religion, culture, and the state. It is hard to understand how the Jewish state could challenge this idea in Islam if it is doing essentially the same thing. But Littell does not ask how Israel can be, simultaneously, a de-politicized "counterculture" within the Middle East, over against the Islamic idea of a Muslim state, and, at the same time, be the only divinely mandated instance of an ethnic theocratic state.

Paul van Buren

A Christian Zionism, which is present only in sketchy form in the Eckarts and Littell, has been fully developed in the writings of Paul van Buren. Van Buren is engaged in a thoroughgoing revision of Christian theological identity in which Christian Zionism assumes a central role. Van Buren is developing his theology of Jewish-Christian relations in a four-part *magnum opus*. The second volume, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel*, presents his basic view of the Jewish people and the relationship of the Christian covenant to the Jewish covenant.
Van Buren's theology was deeply shaped by the theology of Karl Barth. Barth shaped his theological system around a christological monism. Barth’s neoorthodox theology rejected the liberal universalism of nineteenth-century Protestant theologians, such as Schleiermacher. The doctrine of original sin was again taken with radical seriousness. All human beings are fallen and alienated from God and so lack any natural connection with God. Only through Christ has connection with God been restored. This view makes it impossible to give a positive evaluation of any non-Christian religion. Judaism, at best, could have only a preparatory role in the economy of salvation. But, without faith in Christ, Jews remain in darkness.

Van Buren seems to have transferred this monistic concept of historical revelation to the covenant of God with the Jewish people. God (or at least the only God that Jews and Christians know) has made himself known only in one way, as the God who chose the people Israel as his people. The covenant of God with Israel at Sinai is God’s foundational and normative work in creation and the redemption of creation. All other work of God in history (it is not apparent that God is at work in nature at all, according to van Buren’s rejection of all “natural” theology) flows exclusively from this one act of grace.

Van Buren typically uses the metaphor of light and darkness for the relationship of this one revelatory center to Gentile peoples who lack this elect relation to God. He draws this metaphor, not only from its Christian usage, but also from its use in Jewish messianic Kabbalism. The covenant of God with Israel is not only the one place where God is revealed, but also the one place where creation itself is being healed from its brokenness. The Gentile world lacks any natural relation to God and is sunk in darkness, spiritually and morally. Gentiles exhibit the godless nature of humanity, which is to be idolatrous and morally perverse. The Gentile, or natural human being, is a “pagan,” in the negative sense of the term.

However, God is not only the God of Israel but the creator and redeemer of all nations. He has chosen to reach out to the Gentiles through his covenant with Israel. Israel is called, not only to be God’s people, walking in the way of life that God has given them in the Torah. But it is also called to be a light to the Gentiles, to communicate its revelation of God and its healing of creation to the Gentiles. Christianity, or the Christian church, has its identity solely in this extension of God’s covenant with Israel to the Gentiles. Christianity does not have a new covenant, in the sense of a covenant that supersedes the covenant of God with Israel. This covenant is eternal and unchangeable. The church is not a new Israel. The announcement of salvation to the Gentiles is, in one sense, a new work of God in history, but in a strictly auxiliary and dependent relation to the one covenant of God with Israel.

Jesus is not the Messiah of Israel. Christianity completely misunderstood its own foundations by giving Jesus the title of Messiah (Christ). This misunderstanding comes from the fact that Christianity became a Gentile movement, and Gentiles, being by nature “in darkness,” make bad biblical theologians. They need to be constantly taught by Jews to understand biblical revelation. Thus the greater disaster of Christianity was that it cut itself off from its Jewish roots, where it could be taught to properly understand itself by the Jewish tradition. Falling back into the pagan darkness from which it came, Gentile Christianity set itself up in a supersessionary relation to Israel. It developed a teaching of contempt for Jews and Judaism based on the failure of Jews to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. It demanded that Jews abandon their faithfulness to Torah in favor of the new way of salvation in Christ. Such a gospel Jews could only reject with a resounding no. This rejection of the Christian gospel by Judaism, thus, does not represent Jewish unfaithfulness but rather Jewish faithfulness to God. Christians should come to recognize this Jewish no to the Christian gospel as a witness to the truth, recalling Christianity to its true identity.

The culmination of this Christian self-deception, expressed in hostility to Jews, was the Holocaust. But this was simply the extreme expression of a root error, going back to a foundational misunderstanding that appeared as Christianity became a Gentile movement in the second century. Van Buren does not allow that this error appears in the New Testament itself. He contends that, rightly interpreted, the New Testament, including Paul, supports his reading of the auxiliary relationship of the Christian mission to the Gentiles to the one covenant of God with Israel.

Jesus is central for Christianity, but not as the Messiah of Israel or as the basis of a new covenant superseding that of God with Israel. Rather, Jesus is the paradigmatic expression of the covenant of God with Israel for Gentiles. It is where Israel is summed up and given to Gentiles. Gentiles plug into the covenant of God with Israel through Jesus. Therefore, he is central for our salvation, but he is not necessary for the salvation of Jews, who are this covenant themselves.

Once Christians return to their true, auxiliary relationship to the covenant with Israel, then Israel will be able to claim and use the Christian church as its own vehicle for its mission to the Gentiles. This it has not been able to do heretofore because of Christian hostility and misinterpretation of its role. But this depends on the willingness of the Christian church and its teachers to humble themselves and become disciples of the Jewish
tradition. Only by being continually instructed by Jews can Christians keep clear about who they are and what their role in history is. Because of their background as Gentiles, who came into the light from pagan darkness, they can never understand this by themselves.

Central to the faithfulness of Jews to their covenant with God is observance of the Torah. Thus the heart of the Christian false gospel was the effort to invalidate the Torah for Jews. Christians do not need to observe the Torah, for Jesus is their Torah. But the Torah is central to the ongoing response of Israel to its election. Jewish apostasy consists in nonobservance of Torah. God's covenant with Israel also implied a Promised Land. The land has been given by God to Israel in perpetuity, whether Jews are actually present in it or not. No other people, whether they may have dwelled there for centuries or millennia, have any right to this land.

Jewish presence in the land normatively takes the form of a Jewish state. This means a state where Jews alone are full citizens, although the “stranger or sojourner in the land” (non-Jews) should observe the same laws as the Jews (Exod. 12:49; Num. 15:15ff.). This Jewish state cannot be like other states. It is called to a higher destiny, to be not only an exemplar to all other nations, but the place where creation itself is being healed. The Jewish state is the beginning of the redemption of creation. This state is mandated by God to be a theocratic state, a state that is governed, not by a secular constitution, but by the Torah. The Torah is and must be the Law of a Jewish state in order to fulfill its redemptive task, both for itself and for the rest of creation.8

The role of the Christian church is to extend the revelation of the God of Israel—and the healing work of God in and through Israel—to the nations. Christianity should do this, not only by preaching this gospel to the nations, but also by rendering service to the people of Israel. This service takes an external and an internal form. Externally, the Christian church must become the extension of the Anti-Defamation League, combating all anti-Semitism among Gentiles.8 It also takes the form of defense of the State of Israel, both raising money for Israel’s defense and defending the State of Israel against all anti-Zionist calumny.

All criticism of the State of Israel, whether based on alleged injustice to the Palestinians or claims that Israel is unjust to Third World peoples, such as black South Africans or Central Americans, are simply lies, according to van Buren. The so-called Palestinian problem was caused solely by the Arab states, which made the Palestinians refugees and have kept them refugees.9 The claims against Israel made by black South Africans and Central Americans are expressions of base ingratitude for Israel’s generosity.8 It is the job of the Christian church to combat all these lies against Israel, being taught the truth by Jews; that is, the government of the State of Israel.

Jewish and Christian Responses to the Holocaust

Christians should also render an interior or spiritual service to the people of Israel by encouraging all Jews to return to faithful observance of the Torah.10 By implication, this also means encouraging the State of Israel to become a fully theocratic state, where the commandments of Torah are publicly enforced as state laws. The fact that most Israelis are secular, and are vehemently antipathetic to any further extension of the power of the Orthodox rabbinate over their daily lives, matters not to van Buren. He has definite ideas about who is a “true Jew”; a true Jew is a Torah-observant Jew. A nonobservant Jew is not only apostate from God’s commands but threatens the work of redemption of creation that comes from Jewish Torah observance. Thus it is vital, not only for Jews, but for all creation, to see to it that Jews are Torah observant.

Van Buren’s Christian Theology of the People Israel undoubtedly springs from a sincere desire to overcome Christian anti-Semitism and to promote reconciliation of Jews as a people and Christians. But van Buren seems to have checked his critical faculties at the port of entry to the State of Israel. He has uncritically accepted a version of religious Zionism of the Kabbalistic tradition of Abraham Kook. He has also swallowed entirely the Israeli government party line on the history of Israel’s relations to the Palestinians and to the Arab world.

Theologically, he operates out of a monism of revelation that can allow for only one revelation of the one God of history. If this becomes the revelation through the people of Israel, rather than Christ, then Christian revelation and Christian existence must be totally subordinated and auxiliary to the projects of the Jewish people, religious or secular, as defined by themselves. Christians are denied any right to question these Jewish self-definitions, even though Jews themselves are vehemently disputing these definitions between each other. Thus van Buren’s theology seems to exhibit a peculiar flip side of Christian relationship to Judaism, in the form of a self-abnegating philo-Semitism. This is expressed in an overcompensatory identification with Jews that, finally, is unable to allow Jews to be ordinary human beings.

Conclusions

To accept Jews as equally human means appreciating their traditions but also recognizing that they are as capable of organizational, as well as personal, errors as any other people. One of the most dangerous errors of any political system is to set itself up in such a way as to mandate the expropriation of land from an indigenous people and their expulsion and/or reduction to politically second-class and economically exploited status. This is exactly
the error committed by the State of Israel, an error that does not make Israel worse, but much the same as many other nation-states. To criticize this error, to point out its effects on the victims, and to call for change is not anti-Semitism but simply justice. This does not call Jews or Israel to a higher morality than other nation-states. This is the same political morality that needs to be expected of any state in the community of nations that seeks to overcome the heritage of colonialism and to establish a minimally just global social order.

Israel may be more visible as a nation than some other countries with similarly unjust patterns. This is because it is the meeting ground of the three monotheistic faiths and the major geopolitical systems of the world. Yet, despite its visibility, the actual situation of the Palestinians in Israel, in the Occupied Territories, and in surrounding Arab nations has been kept remarkably invisible until recently, or, rather, covered up by disinformation. The highly biased statements about Arabs and Palestinians, found in those few passages in the Eckardts, Littell, and van Buren that notice this question at all, reflect this disinformation. This must be regarded as culpable ignorance on their part. Corrective information can be easily found by talking to Palestinians themselves, critical Jews in Israel or in the Diaspora, and even from Israeli government sources. The ideological bias of these thinkers has blocked them from making the most minimal efforts to verify their views with alternative information.

Frank criticism of political injustices in Israel is not anti-Semitism. One must be clear what anti-Semitism, or any prejudice, is and not confuse it with justified criticism. Prejudicial views against a particular people have several aspects. One element is that crimes are claimed against a group that did not, in fact, happen, such as the medieval ritual murder charge. Or, even if some members of the group, or organized expressions of the group, did commit some evil at some particular time, this is not treated as an instance of a general human capacity but rather of a stereotypic characteristic of the group. Finally, and most importantly, the criticism is made to justify hatred and injustice against the group.

Thus, for example, to say that the papacy is an autocratic form of church government is not anti-Catholicism but a statement of fact. However, to say that all Catholics are autocrats by nature, that they desire to establish autocratic governments that deny other people’s liberties, and therefore should prevent Catholics in Protestant societies from being elected to governmental office is anti-Catholicism.

No one’s anti-Semitism is justified because some Jews, too, may be oppressors. The proper response to any revelation of injustice is compassion for the victims but also sorrow for the victimizers, for theirs is the moral tragedy. The point of authentic criticism of evil is not to justify more hatred and violence but to end the cycle of hatred and violence. This is what Jewish and Christian Holocaust theologians have failed to do, precisely by accepting the Zionist view that response to the Holocaust means uncritical support for the State of Israel.

This critique of the Holocaust theologians, Jewish and Christian, reveals two fundamentally different ethical stances toward anti-Semitism and the Holocaust as expressions of evil. One stance elevates Jewish suffering to unique status. It becomes incomparable with any other human suffering. To mention any other great massacres, such as the destruction of millions of American Indians, or millions of Africans during the middle passage, in the same breath with the Holocaust is seen as trivialization. To even mention Palestinian suffering, the two million refugees, the tens of thousands killed and wounded in assaults on refugee camps and villages, most not commandos but unarmed civilians, is an abomination and a blasphemy. Jewish suffering is innocent and sacred. Palestinian suffering is despicable and deserved.

This effort to elevate Jewish suffering to unique status, incomparable with any other suffering, is self-defeating. It signals to other people a lack of generosity and solidarity with their suffering. It evokes a response of like ungenerosity. Some human rights activists, concerned about all other forms of human suffering, refuse to be concerned about anti-Semitism. They become convinced that this concern is manipulative, a cover for special privileges for the Jews and for the State of Israel in particular. They equate all Jews with their criticisms of Israel, mirroring the Zionist effort to equate Zionism and world Jewry. They refuse not only to mention the Holocaust in their “list” of great human evils, but to be concerned about swastikas on synagogues or bombs thrown into cafés in Europe, simply because the people sitting there are primarily Jewish.

This ungenerosity of some persons of the Left toward Jewish suffering drives those convinced that anti-Semitism is unique and incomparable into further isolation. Leftist human rights activists are labeled the new anti-Semites. The anti-anti-Semitism becomes more and more convinced that anti-Semitism is a unique cosmic mystery that must ever spring up in new forms from “nowhere.” Anti-Semitism becomes the negative side of Jewish election. This adds to their belief that only the State of Israel, as a militarist state, surrounded by ever higher iron walls against the rest of the world, can keep the Jews safe from anti-Semitism.

A fundamentally different ethical stance toward anti-Semitism is one that grounds concern about Jewish suffering with concern for all human suffering. This does not deny that anti-Semitism has unique aspects in its
intertwining of religious and ethnic hostility or that the Holocaust was one of the great infamies of human history. But each of the great human systems of evil has its unique and special peculiarities. Each people experiences its suffering as unique and special to it. But this particularity of each community’s suffering is interconnected in human solidarity. To be concerned about Jewish suffering obliges one to be concerned about black South African suffering, women’s suffering, the suffering of homeless refugee people in many parts of the world, and Palestinian suffering.

This interconnecting of the Jewish suffering and universal human suffering is found in theologians and peace activists, such as Arthur Waskow and Marc Ellis. For Waskow, the Holocaust as the genocidal assault on one people becomes the signal to warn us all against that final holocaust that would annihilate all people and the planet. To remember the Holocaust is to bind all humans together in solidarity to avert that ultimate fire that would destroy us all. Marc Ellis has been developing a Jewish theology of liberation beyond the dialectic of Jewish victimization and empowerment. He seeks to restore a Jewish prophetic voice toward Jewish power and bring Jews into solidarity with other victimized people.

For Ellis, Holocaust theology, as the consensus theology of Jewish-Christian dialogue, which has been forged since 1967, has proved inadequate. Its dialectic of absolute suffering and absolute empowerment has been unable to encompass the realities of the abuse of power. This theology has made both Jewish and Christian Holocaust theologians morally blind to the failure of the Jewish state and the oppression of the Palestinian people. A new theology needs to arise that would encompass the Holocaust and Jewish empowerment but that would transform this dialectic into a theology of solidarity between peoples. Such a theology of solidarity would struggle against human oppression but also realistically recognize that former victims can become new oppressors.

The years 1990 to 2000 saw five major books in which Marc Ellis expanded his reflections on Jewish-Palestinian relations, in the context of the future of Jewish theology and ethics: Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power, Ending Auschwitz: The Future of Jewish and Christian Life, Unholy Alliance: Religion and Arrocity in Our Time, Jerusalem: The Contested Future of the Jewish Covenant, and Revolutionary Forgiveness: Essays on Judaism, Christianity and the Future of Religious Life. In these writings Ellis develops his conviction that, at the end of the twentieth century, after Auschwitz and after the empowerment of the State of Israel as a world military and economic power, in alliance with the U.S. superpower, the meaning of Jewish identity can only be discovered through solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Ellis makes a parallelism between the question of Christian identity after the Holocaust and Jewish identity after the empowerment of the State of Israel. Just as Christians cannot go back before the Holocaust, but can only go forward through solidarity with the Jewish people, their former victims, so too the Jewish people cannot go back before the Holocaust and their empowerment in Israel and the United States to a state of victimized innocence, as subversive marginals in a Christian Europe. The empowerment of Jews in the United States and Israel, which has allowed and ignored Palestinian victimization, means that Jews can only recover their ethical traditions through explicit solidarity with the people that they have victimized and the forging of a new, just future together.

For Ellis the empowerment of the State of Israel, in alliance with the United States, has created a new situation, a “Constantinian Judaism.” Jewish ethics today must be done in confrontation with this Constantinian Judaism, not by constantly harking back to a former innocence before empowerment. Ellis explores the contradications that arise as Jews, in collaboration with “ecumenical” Christians who wish to repent of their former sins against the Jews, create endless monuments to this former innocence, even setting up Auschwitz itself as a monument, in order to cover up and silence the culpability of an empowered present. Instead of remembering Auschwitz in order to “never, never again” allow such atrocities to go on without outcry, Auschwitz is remembered to stifle the cries of Palestinians as their houses are blown up, their land confiscated, and their children maimed with so-called rubber bullets.

Yet Ellis is not just engaged in a prophetic critique of bad faith. He also grounds this critique in the renewal of authentic Jewish ethics, or what he calls “living the covenant in a time of colonialism and evangelization.” For Ellis this means embracing a new “exile” that responds to the false promise that Jewish exile can be ended by a “return” to the land and founding of the State of Israel. This “return” has not created the home of peace and justice that its Zionist founders promised, but has turned the indigenous Palestinian people into exiles, in their own land and throughout the world. In creating a “return” based on violent expulsion of another people from their land, Zionists alienate themselves from the authentic Jewish tradition of ethical living in covenant with God.

Those who seek authentic covenantal life in a justice-seeking community are thus in deep alienation from the very communities who claim to carry out this “return” from exile, but have in fact exiled themselves from the soul of the Jewish tradition. The prophetic critic of this hypocrisy is thus partly cut off from the critic’s own people, who refuse to hear this questioning. But at the same time, the critic finds himself or herself in the company of a new
host of brothers and sisters, Jews and Christians, who likewise seek to protest the hypocrisies and betrayals of their own traditions. Ellis thus forges a vision of an ecumenical community in the context of resistance to the betrayal of authentic hope for justice.

Ellis interprets this vision of a new community of resistance and solidarity through the theme of “revolutionary forgiveness.” Revolutionary forgiveness takes place as those on the opposite sides of many forms of oppression meet and find a common cause together. It takes place as Israelis cross the “green line” and join in solidarity with Palestinians resisting the occupation. In this praxis of repentance by those of the oppressor community, one risks rejection by one’s own community, but also failure to truly meet with the oppressed whom one wishes to know and affirm. It is in the context of this risk that the miracle of forgiveness happens. It cannot be assumed or demanded, but arises as a gratuitous acceptance by the oppressed of the authenticity of those who seek to engage in repentant outreach. It is in this new community of solidarity beyond state religions and their colonizing power that Ellis hopes for an authentic future for Judaism and for Christianity.

Unfortunately, many Western Christian “liberals” are still very much engaged in a kind of “repentance” for the Holocaust that assumes that Christians must be silent on the oppression of the Palestinians by the State of Israel or even dogmatically supportive of its “right to the land” against Palestinian national rights. This has been evident in the popular new book by Catholic writer James Carroll, *Constantine’s Sword: The Church and the Jews*. Carroll has refused to make any links between this issue of Christian anti-Semitism and the rights of the Palestinians. Thus Palestinians are made to pay the price for a Western Christian “repentance” that perpetuates rather than breaks the cycle of violence.

Mutual criticism does not mean a competitive put-down but a concern of communities to help each other be truthful about their failures and to regain their prophetic voice. Thus Christian-Jewish solidarity today must include both a critique of Christian anti-Semitism and a concern to liberate the Jewish community to regain its prophetic voice toward its own system of power. This is not an illegitimizing of Jewish people but a quest for a mutual empowerment of all peoples that can create a more just use of power. The concluding chapter of this book will explore some of the issues that block such a theology of solidarity and mutuality between peoples in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.