



## ***On Jewish Particularity and Anti-Semitism: Notes From a Jewish Theology of Liberation***

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**Abstract:** Today Jewish life is being lived out within the context of unparalleled Jewish empowerment, with an assertive Jewish community with high status and political and economic power in the United States and a militarily successful and expanding state of Israel in the Middle East—though most Jews, as with any community, are living normal ordinary lives involved in making a living and raising families. The contested nature of Jewish life has seen three definitive groups vying for the right to define what Jewish fidelity is in the present. Roughly speaking the three groups are found in America and Israel, and can be defined as the Constantinian Jewish establishment, Progressive Jews and Jews of Conscience. Within this diversity, the Holocaust and the state of Israel loom large; they have come to define Jewish particularity. Those Jews who dissent on the Holocaust and Israel have been labeled self-hating Jews. Non-Jews who dissent on the Holocaust and the state of Israel are seen as anti-Semitic. Anti-Semitism has thus become a tool of protection and power. Is there a way to assert a Jewish particularity that dissents from the abuse of Holocaust imagery and unjust projection of Israeli power while maintaining a solidarity with Jews and Jewish history?

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I begin with two travel stories and related commentary which represent for me a completed circle. That still leaves questions unanswered and a darkly lit path forward on the questions of Jewish identity, the Holocaust and the increasingly perilous situation in the Middle East. Running through these reflections are the questions of Jewish power and anti-Semitism—that is, Jewish particularity in a complex world.

My first travel story begins in 1973, just six years after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when I first traveled to Israel. I traveled on a dare, or rather an admonition from my Hebrew School teacher; when I mentioned Palestinians to him after his return from

travel there in 1968, he spoke harshly to me. How could I know the situation there since I had never traveled to the Middle East?

Traveling in Israel during that time was an eye-opener. Like most Jews of my age, I had been taught little about the reality of Israel, and even less about the “Arabs.” Historical information was scarce, and what was given to us at all—in Hebrew School, in the public schools, in the broader spectrum of American discourse—was now wrapped within the celebration of Israel’s victory in the 1967 war. That celebration also contained a minimum of history and analysis. Instead, we were moved toward a deeper affirmation of Israel as central to our iden-

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tity, Jewish and American. It was at this time that the Holocaust also became central to our Jewish and American identity. History was moving quickly and our identity was absorbing two new formative events, the Holocaust and Israel. Our identity was also changing, and unbeknownst to us, that change would be a work of progress over the next decades. It continues today, albeit in a thoroughly contested form.

What did I see in Israel in 1973? I saw the beauty of the land and the ever changing landscape within a small geographic area. I also saw the disparities of those with European Jewish backgrounds and those of the Arab Palestinians—within the borders of Israel and in the newly conquered territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Though I traveled throughout the land, Jerusalem itself contained this beauty and these disparities. In this, little has changed since that time, all was already in place, for what was to become. The last decades have seen a deepening and an expansion of what is contested in the land. When I visit today, it is like I experience a time warp running forward, as if what was there has simply unfolded and expanded. In short, I saw it all in 1973 and I also understood it all in a nutshell, a historical sensibility. What I needed to do was fill in the blanks.

Perhaps it was fortuitous that while I was traveling in Israel, the October War began. It was Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, when I heard what I thought were fire drill sirens. Walking through a newly constructed apartment complex for newly arrived Jewish immigrants in the Galilee I saw people hurrying down the stairs and entering what I thought was the basement. When I was called to join the apartment dwellers I quickly realized that the war had begun and that basement was a giant bomb shelter. It was not a practice fire drill like we had periodically at our public school, and when the people left the shelter they quickly checked in with their military con-

tacts to see where they were assigned for battle. Israel was at war.

What I understood at this moment was that whatever I thought about Israel—these thoughts were evolving as I traveled the length of the country—much more was at stake than my identity as a Jew. Lives were being formed, developed and destroyed on all sides. The military was in full force, and much of what had happened in the formation of the state, much that would happen, would be decided by the barrel of the gun. At some level, it was all or nothing. Any discourse about Israel and the Palestinians would have to combine thought and *real politik*. Intellectual gamesmanship would not suffice.

More than a decade later, in 1984, I traveled to Israel again this time in response to an invitation to lecture at Tantur, a Catholic and interfaith center outside of Jerusalem. My lecture topic was on the prophetic in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a response to my writing on the Catholic Worker movement in the United States and on the prophetic sensibility I saw in and around that movement with such persons as Martin Buber, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Israel had been on my mind since my first visit but, without a thinking community around me and access to historical and contemporary thinking about Israel and the Palestinians, I didn't know where to place the first-hand experience I had in 1973. However, I had determined that if I accepted the invitation, I would spend time in Israel and to meet and travel with Palestinians, if I could. This was a big if, since networks that exist today to facilitate such meetings and travel hardly existed then. Jews who wanted to meet Palestinians were rare, if they existed at all. Palestinians had a deep mistrust of Jews, as their experience of Jews was as deceivers and conquerors.

After some trial and failure, I succeeded in my mission, and from this I decided that I needed to write about my experience. So many things were in my

mind. Since my last visit the unification and expansion of Jerusalem had grown apace and settlements were becoming more established. The divisions between Jews and Palestinians were becoming more demarcated and long lasting. The Lebanon War, at least in its most intense phase, was over; the 1967 War, and its halcyon image in the Jewish world, was fading quickly, even as the discussion of the Holocaust had become firmly entrenched in the Jewish psyche as the reason for and continual need for a fortress Israel. There were also divisions among Jews, divisions that would deepen over the coming decades. In fact, there was a civil war within the Jewish world, within and outside of Israel, over the occupation of Palestinian lands, the increasing militarism of Israel and even the use of the Holocaust in relation to Israel and war. As Israel was becoming stronger, larger and more entrenched, the enterprise of statehood was increasingly being debated. Could Jews have emerged from the Holocaust to become the conquerors of another people, the Palestinians?<sup>1</sup>

When I returned to the United States I began to write my thoughts down in earnest, and what emerged was a short but intense prospectus on the development of a Jewish theology of liberation. I had some meetings before my travel with the editors of *The Monthly Review* and they encouraged me to send them my thoughts upon my return. Upon the completion of my writing I sent them a copy, and then met with them in New York City. Though our discourse was polite and sometimes intense, they rejected my writing as unsuitable for publication in their journal. As a Marxist journal, or at least one heavily indebted to Marxian analysis, they found my categories of Jewish identity and Holocaust troubling. My emphasis on the history of anti-Semitism

<sup>1</sup> For an extended discussion of my first encounters with Israel see *Reading the Torah Out Loud: A Journey of Lament and Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007).

was also a stumbling block as was my call for a “Jewish” theology of liberation. Liberation within empowerment, the theme that ran through my first essay, was one thing; seeing Israel and Jews themselves through the lenses of particularity was another. For most of the editors, Israel was a Western capitalist colonial venture—only. What I saw around and beneath Israel and Jewish identity was added material, there perhaps to obfuscate the central issue, Western imperialism.

Present at the meeting with the editors of *The Monthly Review* was a Puerto Rican Catholic sister who felt my work was important, and she suggested that I meet with the editors of a new journal, *Theology in the Americas*, an American offshoot of the theology of liberation movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Though they eventually published my essay, they did so as an issue with a number of commentaries from representatives of diverse minority communities in the United States who were struggling to articulate their own liberation sensibility with America. As it turned out, my essay on a Jewish theology of liberation was as controversial among these religious radicals as it was among the secular Marxists. At issue was Jewish identity, the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and perhaps Israel itself. Could Jews, with so much power in America and Israel, be admitted to the ranks of liberationists?<sup>2</sup>

More than two decades after the struggle over the publication of my first essay on a Jewish theology of liberation, with a book of that title now in its third expanded edition, and a slew of experiences relating to writing and speaking publicly on the subject of Jewish identity in relation to the Holocaust and Israel/Palestine—with the occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank

<sup>2</sup> Though one thinks that this argument would be found only on the Right, it is indeed alive in Left circles as well. This makes it extremely complicated to balance Jewish particularity and the quest for justice.

so extensive and permanent that a two-state solution is impossible to contemplate and with the second Lebanon War just completed—I began reading Ilan Pappé's long awaited, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Pappé is an Israeli-born historian, for many years considered one of the leading lights of the historical movement within Israel to reframe the myths of Israel's founding. He and they had been controversial in their original declarations about the flawed origins of the state of Israel. But he, unlike some of his compatriots began drawing conclusions about the wrong done to Palestinians in terms of the rights needed to be recovered—for Palestinians, by Palestinians and Israelis together. This political turning of Pappé's historical understandings, increasingly brought on a controversy, especially when it was becoming clear that he could no longer support Israel as a Jewish state.<sup>3</sup>

Turning the pages of Pappé's book I found little that was new; he and other new Israeli historians had covered much of this material in recent years. What struck me was the conciseness of Pappé's writing and that his conclusions were now largely shorn of academic protective phraseology. Though there were footnotes to anchor Pappé's claims, the document read like a declaration. There was no more hedging. Israel was created by displacing an entire people, that is, by ethnic cleansing Palestinians—that ethnic cleansing was continuing, is now permanent, though millions of Palestinians remained on the land they claim. The only way back is an expanded state on the land that was once called Palestine, a state where Jews and Palestinians would live together in a democratic secular system, citizenship rather ethnic or religious identity being the hallmark, and with the possibility that all Palestinian refugees would have the right to return.

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<sup>3</sup> See Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2006).

Pappé's declaration was clear on the page, but when I heard some months later that he had accepted a teaching position in the United Kingdom, I understood more clearly what Pappé was writing. He had come to the end of a Jewish state in his mind and lifetime. However, the work he had been doing to this end had failed. The Jewish state, as an ethnic cleansing state, would continue indefinitely; he was leaving Israel because he could see no way forward. Israel was supposed to be the end of exile and a haven from persecution; it was now the cause of a further exile, for Palestinians first and foremost, but also for Jews. Was it also a place from which a new wave of anti-Jewishness would begin?

Ilan Pappé in exile. Is this where a Jewish theology of liberation ends? If this is an ending rather than the ending of a Jewish liberationist sensibility, where do Jews pick up the pieces? If Jewish identity is in fragments, what are these fragments and how do they come together? This, in light of the Holocaust, the assumption of power, the abuse of that power, all of this in a world where Jews and Jewish identity have been suspect, at times challenged, other times abused. On the one hand, Jewish identity, as all identities, is a theoretical construct which is contested within and outside of the Jewish framework. On the other hand, Jews are real people, with a sense of a collective destiny, existing then and now in understandable, even if disputed, patterns of living, religion and ethnic identities. Ilan Pappé's circumstances, for example, are completely understandable, individual and also related to a collective understanding of Jewishness in the world. His impending exile is the least original aspect of Pappé's human and Jewish condition. Is it any different, except in time and circumstance, than the various exiles the Biblical canon relates and that Jews have experienced over the millennia?

As Ilan Pappé moves into exile, an exile that Israel was supposed to end, the

younger generation of Jews grapples in their own way with the completed circle that cannot be complete because they are observing and entering that circle without knowing the terrain as a circle. I see this in my own children, especially my older son, Aaron, who recently studied at the American University of Cairo and now is studying in the Czech Republic—an odd coupling at first blush, but certainly not within the context of Jewish history. The contemporary aspects of Jewish history alone suffice: Aaron has been to Israel twice, the first time on his own to help rebuild, with Jews, Palestinians and others from the international community, a demolished Palestinian home. During his summer break after his freshman year, he traveled to Israel and helped rebuild a Palestinian home in the West Bank that had been demolished by Israel; a year later we traveled together to Israel and stood by the two defining walls of contemporary Jewish life; the Wailing Wall, where the ancient Temple once stood, and the Apartheid Wall in Jerusalem and the West Bank, where Israeli power defines the boundaries of the ever expanding Jewish state. Visiting both Walls during the same time helped define the end of my journey and the beginning of his. How to be Jewish and what form will Jewish life take in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

The following year Aaron embarked on a year of study abroad, beginning with the American University of Cairo and concluding in Brno in the Czech Republic. In Cairo he joined and participated in the Al Quds Club, headed by a Palestinian whose membership was largely Arab from various countries in the Middle East. Aaron was their first Jewish member with all the discussions and challenges inherent in such collaboration. While in Brno, Aaron traveled extensively through Eastern Europe, taking representative tours of what had been Jewish life before the Holocaust, and concluded his stay there with visits to a number of death camps, including Aus-

chwitz. I was able to visit him in Cairo as I was asked to address a conference on the future of politics and commitment in Israel. This included the trustworthiness of a Jew, the veracity of the Holocaust and the way it is used and of course whether or not Israel should exist as a Jewish state at all. Aaron's Czech Republic time finished with a tour of the death camps of Eastern Europe, Auschwitz among them. What is Aaron to do with Auschwitz, with Israel, with the Palestinians and Arabs he has as friends, with those who also deny the Holocaust as a historical event and his Jewish identity as worthy of treasuring? Is he beginning to explore his own circle of Jewish identity, one that may parallel my own, or Ilan Pappé's, or the larger canvas of the journey of the people Israel? In continuity or breaking with it, will he also experience the negative feelings of others while embracing that exploration?

Is Pappé's exile the same exile my son, Aaron, will experience? Now twenty years old, Aaron has grown up listening to the contested reality of Jewish life. *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, the book that grew out of the original article, was written as he came to life. The third and expanded edition of the book was published as he left for university studies.

As I traveled with Aaron in Israel and then visited him both in Cairo and Brno, my own experiences were thrown into sharp relief. Was Aaron simply retracing my own footprints, savoring his father-son connection, or was he traveling the road I traveled to see if the completed circle was incomplete? In short, to find out where my journey ended and his began? Close up, he knew the life I had lived, struggling to find my own voice and being hit hard by those in the Jewish community who disagreed with my understandings. He also knew and had met many Jews who were supportive of the arc of Jewish dissent I had embraced. Of course, he had also heard of those who twisted what I had said and wrote to fuel



prejudices they had of Jews. Was there a way out of the twisted pressure cooker he had witnessed through my life as a child? Could he navigate the story of Jews and Judaism through the labyrinth of past suffering and present power? In doing this, could he fashion a positive identity as a Jew in solidarity with others, Jewish and non-Jewish?

### **ON THE PRIMAL COVENANT AND CONTESTED JEWISH IDENTITY**

The circle of Jewish life, with its beginnings and endless middles, its endings and new beginnings, can they be defined in abstract and essentialist terms? In some sense theoretical constructs can be helpful, pointing here and there to find the markers and boundaries of Jewish life. Yet as important are the lived life of Jews throughout the ages and the contemporary life of Jews, honing the theoretical through concrete patterns of Jewish life and thought. Still, this theoretical and lived reality is not simply internal. From the beginning of the people of Israel the contested internal definitions of what it means to live a Jewish life have been complimented by external definitions of Israel, Jews and Judaism. It is in and through the internal and external dynamic of defining Jewish life that Jews have lived and continue to live. This means, at the outset, that parameters set in antiquity were and continue to evolve. In each generation the struggle to be faithful as a Jew is, as it were, up for grabs.

Today Jewish life is being lived out within the context of unparalleled Jewish empowerment, with an assertive Jewish community with high status and political and economic power in the United States and a militarily successful and expanding state of Israel in the Middle East—though most Jews, as with any community, are living normal ordinary lives involved in making a living and raising families. The contested nature of Jewish life has seen

three definitive groups vying for the right to define what Jewish fidelity is in the present. Roughly speaking the three groups are found in America and Israel, and can be defined as the Constantinian Jewish establishment, Progressive Jews and Jews of Conscience. For definitional purposes, these groups can be grouped into three categories; neo-conservative, liberal/left of center and radical. The identity politics each group holds are important in the self-understanding of each: Constantinian Jewish life revolves around the Holocaust and Israel as central to Jewish life and thus increasingly adopt a neo-conservative politics of remembrance and empowerment; Progressive Jews, while affirming the Holocaust and Israel as central to Jewish life, see the Israel's occupation of the Palestinians as formative for this generation and a blight on Jewish innocence and purpose, thus supporting a two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian crisis as a way forward for the Jewish people; Jews of Conscience see the twinning of the Holocaust and Israel in power over others as a deformation of Jewish life and character that can only be addressed through a radical evaluation of the uses of Jewish power in America and Israel. Though perhaps a bit too easy, a shorthand understanding of where each group stands can be summarized as follows: Constantinian Jews form the Jewish establishment; Progressive Jews, as critics while being indebted to Jewish power, form the Left wing of Constantinian Judaism; Jews of Conscience are seeking a way out of the closed circle of Constantinian Jewish reality.

The internal groupings of Jewish life are fascinating in their diversity and the fact that they are struggling with the same issues of contemporary Jewish life that are shadowed by the ancient and recent past. Crucial here is the Holocaust, and the varying interpretations of what the memory of the Holocaust means. Yet, as important, is the definition of what it means to be protected from another Holocaust or the situa-

tion that might lead there in the future. Thus empowerment is for status, wealth and security—as with any community. But for Jews an added layer is the history of animosity, dispossession and death that has accompanied the Jewish journey into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Broadly defined as anti-Semitism or perhaps more accurately as anti-Jewishness, though even this definition is hotly contested, the reality of negative feelings, legislation, and police actions against Jews is hardly disputable, at least historically. Though there are many twists and turns, the positive embrace of Judaism and Jewishness has often been shadowed by rational and irrational sensibilities that demean, dislocate and destroy Jewish individuals and communities. At times this assault has taken on a wider sensibility to involve what appears to be an assault on the very notion of the Judaic that Jews are seen as and perhaps actually embody. This assault can be seen concretely in the history of different movements in Western history including Christianity, the Enlightenment and Fascism. All three had negative views of the Jews that formed part of their ideological and identity constructs. All three were at some level obsessed with the idea of Jews, Judaism and the Judaic. As if their way into the world could only be assured if the Jews and the Judaic were first cleared out.

Jewish life is thus shadowed by the Holocaust, the creation and expansion of Israel, the displacement and diminishment of Palestinians and Palestine, and the division of Jews around these questions—all with the lingering questions of what to do with views of Jews that are divisive and derisive; of how to define whether views of Jews are indeed either, or they are simply disagreements about policies of the state of Israel and positions taken by Jews in America, without all or any historical baggage (that is, if Jews and Jewish behavior can be analyzed without historical baggage and/or insight). And this doesn't even touch upon the equally intensive and often elusive

question about Jews who hold this view or that on the Holocaust, Israel, Palestinians, and power in general and the host of issues that come with power after being powerless. Does all of this reverberate only because there is a sense that there is a particular Jewish identity through history and now, or a debate about that sensibility, whether it can be held and how, from non-Jews and, of course, from Jews themselves?

A generation of reflections on the Holocaust, coupled with the creation and expansion of Israel—and the use of the Holocaust to buttress Israel's claims and deny the Palestinian right to national integrity—in many ways defined the Jews and Judaism in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It continues to do so in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The question, while age-old—What does it mean to be Jewish?—is defined in every generation, for Jews themselves and about Jews by non-Jews. Recently and today that definition has revolved around the Holocaust, Israel and the Palestinians. And though there have been varying singular moments in this definition, times when that definition has been relatively uncontested and times when the contested nature of self-definition has been highlighted, the question today is whether any other self-definition is possible. In the mainstream but through the power of the mainstream, Jews are defined by where they stand in relation to this center—thus the strength of Holocaust/Israel consciousness. Could this strength also be its weakness?<sup>4</sup>

At issue is the definition of Jewish identity and Jewish commitment, that is, the meaning of fidelity as a Jew after the Holocaust and within the expanding state of Israel. Certainly, this fidelity demands political stances: Jewish power is part and parcel of the ability to articulate a public sensibility of the importance of the Holo-

<sup>4</sup> For a concentrated analysis of Holocaust theology see my third and expanded edition of *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004).

caust. However, Israel serves within the Jewish identity structure, and it is first and foremost a nation-state with all the physical needs and tools of power of any national player in the international system. Without Jewish power within and outside the state of Israel, Jewish identity would be quite different. Even its memory of the Holocaust would change dramatically. The question here is how memory and the need for security after the massive assault of the Holocaust would be articulated. The empowered nature of Jewish identity is so triumphant that it is difficult to see how Jewish identity would be worked out if power had never been achieved or, through a voluntary relinquishment or military and economic defeat, how Jews would define themselves in a post-Holocaust, post-Israel, post-empowerment scenario.

The very threat of this “post” reality haunts the Jewish community. As does the “pre” reality. In a sense Jews are caught within a present haunted by the past, but one that also fears the future. Yet the present, with these fears, is also profoundly unsettled. If the past and future haunts contemporary Jewish life, contemporary Jewish life is haunted by the present as well. The questions that come from the past are part of this haunting, not only because of the suffering Jews have undergone, but because so much of Jewish life has preceded and transcended that suffering. This includes the mission of Israel, the people, set forth in her canonical books; it also includes a highly developed way of reasoning through the dichotomous reality of a “chosen people” living in decidedly difficult Diaspora circumstances. This and the fact that the Jewish contributions to the larger forces of global civilization has primarily been in thought and analysis rather than in the brute forms of military adventurism. In a similar way, the future haunts Jews, even the Judaic, because if a temporary situation of emphasizing an empowered memory and state becomes permanent, the guiding

forces of historic Israel will continue to atrophy, and may even dissipate to the point where recovery of the main impulses of Jewish identity will become impossible.

The thick layer of the emergency post-Holocaust situation is now threatening to become the main, indeed the only, way of self-definition. Does anyone, even at this point, believe that a redefinition, a movement backward in order to create a Jewish future different than the present, is possible—since there are still some Jews who were formed before the Holocaust/Israel identity center coalesced, thus able to touch the aspects of Jewish life, if only in memory, before the new center closed off previous definitions? Will this still be available to those born after the center was established and reified to such an extent that any critique of the present is considered an assault on the very possibility of Jewishness existing in the world?

Thus are the push and pull of any identity, ancient springs surrounding culture, land and religion clashing with the contemporary reality of the community, such as it is and such as it is imagined—and even more so when the gods are involved and still more when, at least in memory and claim, the identity of the people who carry the original monotheist God, is at stake. Though no doubt exaggerated and self-involved, the community that claims to be the physical markers of the monotheist God, and who maintain, through continuity and discontinuity, that they are the original people in the contemporary world, will struggle for that claim against others and will struggle mightily within for that claim. As the authentic Jew and Jews represent a deep and primal identification, can the survival and authenticity of such a marked people be taken lightly?

At stake here is the covenant, the give and take of the Promise, land and ethics, a gathering collective that is at the center of history, as the claim is made and affirmed over the generations. That claim—or series



of claims—cannot be externally verified. Rather, it is an internal marker that is deeper than the various investigative methodologies that have buttressed and dismissed the asserted truth claims of identity and power. Though not immune from these methodologies, and often pioneering them, in the end they have served to make more primal and more hidden—thus more explosive?—the original claims in relation to God and peoplehood. It is difficult to argue that the Jewish will to narrate history from a Jewish perspective has weakened over time or that calamity, most recently mass death, has dampened the Jewish nerve in this regard. On the contrary, a tremendous and sometimes irritating resiliency is in evidence. It is difficult to argue that the narration of the Jewish drama is anywhere less in evidence than it has been over the millennia and, in fact, the opposite can be argued. Never before has the Jewish drama been so boldly argued on a world stage. It can also be argued that never have Jews combined the communication of their narrative in a global dimension with the military empowerment attending this communication. This also means that the Holocaust is the most studied and well known historical event at least in the West if not in the world.

### WHAT SAYS A JEWISH THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION ON THE QUESTION OF ANTI-SEMITISM?

A Jewish theology of liberation begins here, in the welter of Jewish life, its inheritance and contemporary life, situated within that life and aware of that which is outside as well. In short, a Jewish theology of liberation seeks a way forward for Jews, aware of and affirming others, with a particularity intact, knowing that its particularity is internally and externally contested, with a sense that Jewish particularity, especially its covenantal reality, has significance for itself and beyond itself. As an original carrier of

the prophetic, with the potential of continuing to carry the covenant at stake, a Jewish theology of liberation is insistent on the practice of justice and concrete concern for the other—as justice and more than justice. For the covenant in history represents a way of being in the world, received and practiced, a light in the world that has spread and can be extinguished. Thus the practice of the covenant, even in exile within Jewish life, is worthy of exploration and sacrifice as a testimony to the powers that be, Jewish and non-Jewish, that those on the margins of the local, regional, national and global systems have worth and possibility beyond those systems. Even as they are challenged and transformed, a Jewish theology of liberation must speak and act as if those on the margins are the engines of a humane alternative of systems and a life lived with justice and compassion as the norm—one day.<sup>5</sup>

That those who ostensibly carry the covenant, Israel the people, controvert the covenant and practice injustice, is indisputable, and is already uncovered in vivid detail in the Torah. The Exodus wandering is already full of doubt and betrayal on whether Israel itself can carry out its own liberation to its fullest, and even whether it can even approximate that liberation. Later, after entering the Promised Land, the prophets appear in great numbers, continually, without relief, and pronounce judgment on a recalcitrant and obtuse people. Especially those in power and those benefiting from it, but also extending it, at least the ramifications of this reversion, to the ordinary Israelite, Israel itself is punished re-

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<sup>5</sup> Writings on anti-Semitism continue to proliferate, running the gamut from traditional interpretations to challenging how anti-Semitism is used and whether or not it is simply a cover for Jewish power. For examples of these varying interpretations see Daniel Cohn-Sherbok, *The Paradox of Anti-Semitism* (London: Continuum, 2007) and *The Politics of Anti-Semitism*, edited by Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair (Petrolia, California: CounterPunch, 2003).

peatedly, decidedly and, one might say, cruelly, for its transgressions, exile from the land being the most explicit, seemingly final punishment. In the Biblical canon, exile from the land is exile from the covenant. This also means a distance from God, perhaps even the end of God's parental love for Israel. Reading the Torah and the prophets, one can't help but feel the force of these admonitions. With the accompanying vision of Israel restored, Isaiah's vision, for example, is enshrined within the contemporary world in such diversity as the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the United Nations.

Within Israel the people, itself, that vision is atrophying, as it has often done. Constantinian Judaism has taken the land as a place of exclusive empowerment for Jews, and the memory of Jewish suffering as a license for unaccountability. Using the prophetic but pointing it outward only, thus distorting it by marginalizing others politically, militarily and economically, while at the same time using its power to marginalize the prophetic within, Constantinian Judaism diminishes the Jewish witness in the world. Is it any wonder that there is so much opposition to their sensibility in the international political realm and among Jews themselves?

To use power effectively, Constantinian Jews project Jewish power in what it considers and articulates as a hostile world. That hostility is defined as anti-Semitism, old and new, both seeking to undermine the Jewish presence in the world and perhaps even to eliminate Jews and Jewishness from the world itself. To make these claims, Constantinian Jews point to the history of anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust, as an assault against a Diaspora and vulnerable people, and in the various critiques of Israel, coming from a variety of quarters, beginning with the Palestinians, Arabs and spreading to an increasing number of international politically attuned groups, especially those coming from or affiliated with

Third World movements. Liberation theology, as a Christian movement that promotes justice for the poor of the world and critiques world systems that create and maintain poverty on a global scale, is a negative rallying point for Constantinian Jews, as is the September 11<sup>th</sup> event, with the equation now of Islamic "terrorism" with a movement in the world that articulates a profound unease with, among other things, American and "Zionist" powers. In short, since Israel is a Jewish state, everything and everyone that seeks to question, change or overthrow those forces that protect and enhance that state are seen within the generalized purview of anti-Semitism—as a threat and direct assault against the Jewish people itself, and as a portent, should such understandings be implemented, of a future Holocaust.

Progressive Jews, led by people like Michael Lerner of the Jewish journal *Tikkun*, seek a middle road between, and an accommodation with, Constantinian Judaism. Seeing the Holocaust and Israel as central to Jewish life, but also disputing the direction that the Constantinian Jewish establishment takes these events in, the progressive Jewish movement argues for a two-state settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a movement of Jewish energies toward a more holistic and just world economic and political order. Here Michael Lerner's "politics of meaning" comes into play, as does his arguments against anti-Semitism as a conservative and leftist confusion structuring their ideologies over against Jews and Judaism—an ancient canard that diverts attention from the real power hungry and corrupt culprits found in every community and nation. Lerner and Progressive Jews in general seek to manage external views of Jews and also Jewish dissent within. Jewish empowerment and Israel as a Jewish state are defined as essential to Jews and Judaism, thus to Jewish identity. Criticism of both within certain boundaries is valid, as is the criticism of Constantinian

Judaism. Outside of those boundaries set by the progressive movement, Jews within as well as non-Jews without, are treading on the dangerous grounds of anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup>

The question is joined. Who is to set the boundaries of acceptable dissent vis-à-vis Jews? The boundaries are two fold: those who criticize from outside of the Jewish fold and those who criticize from within. Constantinian Jews set boundaries which Progressive Jews, for the most part, transgress; Progressive Jews set other boundaries which seem, on the surface and certainly to both parties, to be quite different. However, the boundaries they share, though they would fiercely dispute this, are greater than the ones that diverge. For one, Jewish empowerment is sacrosanct, as are the parameters of that power to be defined by Jews. Israel as a Jewish state, for example, is beyond question. While Constantinian Jews refuse to discuss any critique of Israel's power—say, for example, within Jerusalem and the West Bank—Progressive Jews are willing, at least theoretically, to demand an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders of Israel. For Progressive Jews the Jewish occupation and settling of the West Bank is the problem that can be corrected by withdrawal from the territories. Silenced, however, is any mention of the 1948 war, the creation of Israel and the beginning of the continuing Palestinian catastrophe. To question 1948 would place into question Jewish empowerment as it is known today and Jewish innocence—two themes that Constantinian and Progressive Jews share.

Both groups set innocence as a cornerstone boundary. The questioning of Jewish innocence, as the culmination of Jewish suffering and goodness, is first and foremost, a red line affair. That something within Jewish particularity and assertion could be

flawed at a substantive level rather than at a level that can be addressed through a midlevel correction, is forbidden. As is the sense that collective Jewish identity as expressed in the world somehow transgresses other sensibilities. Here the assertion of chosenness, in its religious and secularized forms, is seen as unchallengeable on intellectual or theological grounds. This challenge also has political ramifications, and it is sometimes difficult to discern which is more offensive to Constantinian and Progressive Jews. The prioritizing of Jewishness as a value and force in the world is taken for granted by Constantinian and Progressive Jews with the assertion that foundational questions seek to dismantle Jewish particularity and innocence, thus rendering Jews vulnerable as individuals and as a collective.

Within and among the Jewish community the boundaries are set as rigidly. Both Constantinian and Progressive Jews are on permanent look out for those Jews who do not, in their opinion, value Jewish particularity and assume Jewish innocence. The fear is that Jews who move into these dimensions, if only to search out another way of viewing themselves and their Jewishness, are in league with, or serve the purposes of, those who seek to contravene Jewish claims in the world. In this way, the anti-Semitism that comes from those outside the Jewish community is complemented by those within the Jewish community that both Constantinian and Progressive Jews label as self-hating Jews. Though this category, like anti-Semitism, has a long and detailed history, the present discussion of self-hating Jews serves as an ideological lens through which to see Jewish dissent that moves beyond the allowed parameters as defined by those who articulate Constantinian and Progressive positions in the public realm. Of course, this also moves beyond such public articulation with the personal and professional shunning of Jewish dissenters that exist in the

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<sup>6</sup> For Michael Lerner's take on anti-Semitism see his *The Socialism of Fools: Anti-Semitism on the Left* (Oakland: Tikkun Books, 1992).

nether land of the accepted parameters of Jewish definition.

Where do Jewish dissenters stand in relation to this Constantinian/Progressive Jewish synthesis? By probing innocence at a deeper level, the charges often fly that they have abandoned the very meaning of what it means to be Jewish in our time. On hold, and open for criticism, is the use of the Holocaust to justify certain forms of Jewish empowerment; Israel is also open for a critique that moves beyond the aftermath of the 1967 War. Is it really Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories that is the problem? Or are these settlements simply the continuation of an earlier settlement process that began before and took on a systematic quality with the birth of Israel? Jews of Conscience are therefore critical of the twinning of the Holocaust and Israel as bulwarks of thought and practice that inherently limits the probing of contemporary Jewish life. Culpability on the political and theoretical levels is here open for discussion, a discussion that is waylaid by the Constantinian/Progressive parameters of thinkable thought. At issue are the entire apparatus of Jewish funding and placement of Jewish and Holocaust Studies in American universities and the public memorialization of the Holocaust represented by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and satellite memorials around the United States. The question is not about the Holocaust event, or even its uniqueness. Rather it is about the use of resources for memorialization that leads to constructs of Jewish innocence while abuse of power takes place in the present.<sup>7</sup>

Here forces are joined with thought outside of the Jewish community, including among Palestinians, where issues of power are at stake, with justice and injustice being

the measurement, rather than specific community affiliations being at stake. However, the use and abuse of power cannot be analyzed in depth without the ideological, religious and cultural constructs being at issue as well. Power exercised always has a rationale. There is logic to power argued, usually in terms of innocence, and each particular community argues its power within certain communal parameters. Can it thus be justified that Jewish power is discussed without critically evaluating the matrix from which it comes?

### IS JEWISH PARTICULARITY *THE* STUMBLING BLOCK?

But the question remains: What is appropriate probing and what isn't? This question no doubt applies to all groups, religions and cultures. Are there unique and specific boundaries when this critical analysis is applied to Jews? If there is a universal application, what does this mean for Jews particularity, in relation to those outside the Jewish community and those within? If there are restrictions regarding Jews and Jewish particularity, what are they, and who is invested with the authority to set them? Does a Jewish theology of liberation have anything of significance to say regarding these parameters?

Some concrete boundaries that are in question: Does questioning the following draw the label anti-Semitic? If so, is it appropriate to label such questions as anti-Semitic?

First, some questions involving Israel and the Palestinians: Do Jews and others need to affirm the existence of Israel as a Jewish state? Within that affirmation, does this mean a preferential treatment for Jews and a second class citizenship for Israeli Arabs, or none at all? How about the creation of Israel itself, the assertion of Israeli independence and the cleansing of the vast majority of Palestinian Arabs from the

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<sup>7</sup> Expansion of these thoughts on Constantinian Judaism, Progressive Jews and Jews of Conscience see *Reading the Torah Out Loud*.

territory where Israel was established? If deliberate ethnic cleansing is charged, rather than the fog of a war joined by Jews and Arabs, should this be considered anti-Semitic? In the present, if the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state is discussed and affirmed, is the argument for two-states, Israel and Palestine side by side, sufficient, making the desire for a one state solution, that is the dissolution of a Jewish state, *per force*, a form of anti-Semitism?

Second, some questions involving the Holocaust: Do Jews and others need to affirm the Holocaust as a “Jewish” event, that is the mass death of six million Jews as the focus, for all practical purposes relegating the “others” that died during the Nazi pursuit of world empire to oblivion? Does refusing the twinning of the Holocaust and Israel, the Holocaust leading to Israel, Israel as the heir of the Holocaust, signal an assault on Jewish self-definition—this, too, with questioning the Holocaust itself? Besides the focus and the twinning, is any deconstruction of Holocaust scholarship allowable without the charges of Holocaust denial being applied? Going further, is Holocaust denial anti-Semitic?

Third, some questions directly involving Jewish particularity: Do Jews and others need to affirm Jewish particularity as it is defined and articulated by Constantinian and Progressive Jews? Noted in this definition is a particularity grid that involves Jewishness as essentially inherited, for the most part European in memory, affirming aspects of the Biblical canon, including among other claims, the claim of chosenness, Israel as the Promised Land, Jews with a special destiny in the world, the right of Jewish survival in the world with a collective identity, and the power, economically, politically and culturally to demand and sustain that empowerment. Do disputes, interventions, and interruptions of this particularity grid signal inappropriate behavior that needs to be disciplined and labeled as anti-Semitic?

The areas above, listed and posed as questions, are certainly not exhaustive. There is an entire literature written by Jews and others that seek to develop these categories as positive affirmations of what it means to be Jewish in the world and as boundary areas where others, with different views, are hardly welcome. Of course these are all areas which are highly contested from a variety of angles, questioning, for example, what chosenness means historically and in the present, or, in relation to the state of Israel, the reason for its founding and how it relates to Jewish history. Here the question usually posed is whether the establishment of Israel, again in the context of Jewish history, was to normalize the Jewish condition, removing minority status and allowing Jews, for the first time in two thousand years, to be like other nations. Or whether the establishment of the state of Israel was to allow Jews, again for the first time in two thousand years, to become, as a nation, a light unto the nations? This light, of course, very much depends on the state of Israel acting unlike other states. For the most part, forgotten here is another line of thinking present as the state of Israel was coming into being; the idea of a Jewish homeland in a binational Palestine, one where Jews, recovering their connection to the land where Israel, the people, came into being, at the same time recovering authentic Jewish culture and the Hebrew language that defined Jews through the millennium.

Without in any way pretending to be an exhaustive list or analysis of particulars, we are faced with the question of the boundaries and particularity itself, the Jewish assertion of a difficult though favored beginning and a destiny that takes precedence in the world. With and without overt religious appeal, this particularity has aspects of self-definition that are common with other particularity identities and, it can be argued, unique aspects of self-definition that are closed to the Enlightenment reasoning that characterizes most political,



cultural and identity discussions today. Whether verifiable or not, Jewish discourse in the main asserts different origins, claims and privileges than are acceptable today, even when other particular discourses are held open for examination. On the question of the Jewish community in what became the state of Israel, for example, those Jews who sought normality and those who sought a recovery of the special destiny of the Jewish people both argued from the perspective of Jewish particularity in the world. The first argued that Jewish particularity had become skewed in the Jewish sojourn among the nations and that Jews needed a special place, by themselves, in order to be fully Jewish and fully human. The second argued that only by reversing the Diaspora situation of Jews and returning to a particular land could Jews recover authentic particularity. In both cases, Jewish needs, real or imagined, were argued within the context of Jews' needs and values. Though homeland Zionists were more aware of Palestinian Arabs in the land and did see them as the litmus test for that return, their Jewish self-involvement was more or less the same as those Jewish settlers that wanted to normalize the Jewish condition through the establishment of a Jewish state and only wanted Palestinian Arabs pushed off the land. In any case, would the situation of Palestinian Arabs have fared any differently; without Jewish particularity at the forefront both state and homeland Zionists can only be seen as colonial interlopers with claims on the land that come from outside, from a religious canon, and from a contemporary European history that should have been settled within Europe.

So, too, is the Holocaust. Could the Holocaust, named and understood as it is today, come into being without the claims of Jewish particularity? The event itself, so defined as the willful and targeted extermination of six million Jews as the *raison d'être* of the Nazi regime, occurred within the larger

context of World War II. The naming of the Holocaust is retrospective to the Nazi years and even after that naming, as did the specific focus on Jews as almost the sole victims of the Nazi era, came into being in the 1960s, mostly in America, but with a concomitant growth of Holocaust consciousness in Israel. In fact, Holocaust memory, at least as constitutive of Jewish identity, came into being with the trial of Adolph Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and in years following the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. This was in the context of a deepening empowerment of Jews in American and in Israel, the consolidation of the latter at least in direct relation to the final dispossession of Palestinians of their existence within the state of Israel, and the initiation of their dispossession from large areas of Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Without a sense of the particular, Jewish life is a non-sequitur, an ancient culture or one related to it, brought into and nourished in the contemporary world. Of course, if Jewish identity is suspect, other identities would have to undergo a similar evaluation; their particulars, whatever they might be, would also have to be analyzed. Can any identity survive that identity, intact, as authentic or even usable? One thinks here of the racial, ethnic, national and religious identities of, to cite a few examples, Christians, African-Americans, Muslims and Russians. Right away we notice the broad coverage of what would seem, under closer investigation, to be diverse subgroups that might or might not attach itself to the broader self-definition. Some groups within the broader definition might not even identify with their supposed identity. Or, identity identification of some groups might be suspect historically, whatever one thinks of the overall identity claim, which simply demonstrates the difficulties inherent in any identity claim.

Still, with all the problematics involved—and even as many come to the conclusion that identity formations are self-

constructed that serve as covers for all sorts of shenanigans, including the displacement of others and persecution of those within who seek another identity formation that is more just and compassionate—these identity claims continue to exist. More than simply existing as ancient hangovers or new constructions to highlight shifting sensibilities, identity helps root individuals in a purpose greater than themselves and thus in a meaning structure that involves and moves beyond the trials and tribulations of individual life. While particularity is often used to mobilize those with power in their imperial designs or those without power in their imperial designs, it also can give solace and resistance possibilities to those on the margins of life. Sometimes those who come from privilege or become privileged, and seek to speak for those whose voices are not heard among the privileged, may look askance at identity formations that are easily deconstructed through historical information and political critique. Still, the stubbornness of identity claims needs to be addressed as well, through the claims themselves and the people that hold to them, as authentic in the search for a meaningful life and a connection to deeper currents of history that help anchor us in a universe that may or may not pay attention to human life itself.

My point here is that identity, wherever it comes from and however it is applied, should be taken seriously on many levels, including its most simplistic level, even if that simplistic level is easily questioned or dismissed. As often as not, the identity inquisitor is operating from an assumed identity—perhaps a hidden or unannounced identity—of his or her own. All human life and discourse has a discoverable and analyzable identity; without exception all discourse comes from a context and is argued within a context, often contexts, featuring internal and external, announced and assumed, dialogues that are diverse internally and externally. And all discourse, in

one way or another, crosses identity and interacts with identity—identities—proposing another identity formation even if it remains unnamed. This means the interlocutor's identity will, if given the space and power, coalesce at some point, or might do so, to the point where that identity will have been called on the carpet, less the argument against identity hegemony become, under different circumstances, itself an identity hegemony. That will need to be interrupted.

The discussions regarding identity, especially those that critique essentialism in its various forms, as if identity is inherited, fixed and/or static, are voluminous. In general they amount to a sophisticated attempt to interrupt identity formations, especially those that are empowered and abuse that empowerment. In seeking to override the powerful and its imperial/colonial tendencies, sometimes alternative forms of identity are offered, other times new identity formations are suggested. As often the interruption *per se* is the only offering, criticisms well taken but with no other possibilities offered. At other times dissolution of the entire identity structure is advanced or a replacement identity structure is offered that is difficult for the identity holders to understand or comprehend. Such dissolutions and replacements may be, in certain circumstances, of absolute necessity, for example, Nazism. In other circumstances, say Christianity or Islam, the critique of the reasonableness and believability of their identity structure needs to be limited, it seems, to the public transgressions they commit. Within the critique, however, it might be found that the very structure of Christian and Islamic identity necessarily leads to excesses. Is it then possible to argue that Christianity and Islam should be forced to retreat and even be eliminated?

Of course the question of identity cuts so many ways that transgression against others at one moment might give rise to the

strength to resist the next. This is not to dismiss the travails imposed in the first place, nor can it foreclose another disaster in the future. It is simply to suggest that identity is composed of many layers, and which layer an identity will emphasize at any particular time is in doubt. National identities work in this fashion as do religious identities. How often the conquering religion becomes later a way of critiquing the conqueror is illustrated by the long and varied history of Christianity in Latin America. Recently accented during the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary/celebration/commemoration of Christianity's arrival in the Americas in 1492, the issue was raised again with Pope Benedict's recent visit to Brazil.

Lingering here for a moment, the contradictions of identity formation in the Latin American and Christian contexts are astounding—even as they appear at this moment. We have a German born Pope who spent his youth as Nazism was in full flourish who, according to his autobiographical statements, became a priest as a protest against this experience, ascended to power in the Church with a specialty in Church discipline, including using his authority to limit or disappear liberation theology, which itself is a movement that criticizes the historic imperialism of the Catholic Church and the elements of the imperial Church still surviving in the present. Now Pope Benedict, like his predecessor, has continued to press the claims of the imperial Church, its history and the present, while also being forced to criticize both. The same is true with regard to the Vatican, as a recognized state actor, in relation the nation-states that Popes visit; they affirm aspects of nationality while criticizing other aspects of it. Thus this Christian particularity is caught in a vast web of claims and counter-claims within and outside of it. And this is not to mention the surviving indigenous communities who now make claims on the Church and within the Church—or the vast Christian movements

that threaten Catholic hegemony in Latin America, a prime reason for Benedict's visit. Was this complicated visit different from Benedict's earlier journey to Auschwitz, a further step along the Church's systematic and diverse attempt to come to grips with Jewish particularity after the Holocaust and since Vatican II?<sup>8</sup>

### **A FOUNDATIONAL JEWISH PARTICULARITY FOR THE FUTURE AND A DEFINED ANTI-SEMITISM**

Identity complications interrupt any and every essentialism. However, there is no predictable outcome to the interruptions; advances can be reversed. Terror of one form or another, quieted and even confessed, can return. Quiet and confession can even be a strategy for the renewal of particularity's force. That force can work in diverse ways and can be furthered or overcome by other elements within the identity formation in flux. This inherent unpredictability throws into suspicion those leading reform and renewal movements related to identity; it may even caution against strong identity formations, even when we judge their direction to be just.

There being no essentialism and no predictable outcomes to identity interruption, are there, therefore, any entitlements to particularities, places where particularities are free to roam without interference or deconstruction, foundations that can be asserted without fear of contradiction? If so, how would this understanding apply to Jewish particularity and its sometimes accompanying shadow, anti-Semitism?

Here a working definition of anti-Semitism is offered: as an assault on Jewish-

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<sup>8</sup> I am reflecting on Benedict and Christian particularity in general in my current and as yet untitled work in progress. Earlier reflections on some of these themes see my *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

ness, Judaism and the Judaic in its varied conceptual formulations and in its working against the very being of those who carry these formulations as a form of embodied identity. This assault can be carried out in a variety of ways, mostly in the public realm, but also in small groupings within and across national borders, as substructures of other religious, cultural and political understandings, so that the very being of Jews is questioned and the worthiness of holding aspects of this identity is demeaned.

In the concrete, and in relation to the hot button issues of contemporary Jewish life, there needs to be barriers between critiques of the use of power and the ability to affirm or believe that certain aspects of reality are reserved for Jews.

Again we return to the state of Israel and the Holocaust. With regard to Israel, Jews have a right, mostly derived from contemporary history, of asserting the need for a specifically and secure Jewish empowerment. The history of Jews in Europe especially warrants this haven, at least theoretically. Wherever Jews are, they, as others who are vulnerable, have the right to protection and structures that promote Jewish individual and collective well-being. Since Jews have combined aspects of ethnicity, religion and nationality from the beginning of their sojourn, it is reasonable to expect that variations of this combination are foundational to Jewish existence. Jews have a right to some form of this foundational combination in the various contexts of modern life and the evolving nature of national and international life. Of course, internal questions and disputes about how this foundation will be lived, what combinations of foundational themes are possible and preferable in the present context exist and will continue to. In the modern period, but again all through Jewish history, each aspect of foundational Jewish life has been up for grabs, boldly embraced and hardly criticized. Clearly, and this is another distinctive aspect of the foundation, perhaps

the indigenous feature of the Judaic that informs the whole panoply of Jewish possibilities, the prophetic here is central; can Jewish life be imagined without this central and compelling idealism?

The prophetic is the key to Jewish life, its driving force, a pattern of thought, insight, argumentation, judgment and compassion, which is unique and long lasting. It is, from the Jewish point of view, a great gift to the world. Thus, the prophetic asserted, though always under assault from within the Jewish community, is also a bridge to other particularities that likewise have the right to their own foundations. Surely none of these particularities exists in a vacuum and all, including Jewish particularity, are borrowers as well as originators in all aspects of their lived reality. These historical and contemporary borrowings are part of the foundation of each particularity; they are also bridges to one another. Understanding particularities as containing foundational elements that are original—in so far as anything human can claim originality, and clearly borrowed, even if the memory of the community weaves the borrowed in a way that disguises the community's debt to other particularities—demands that each particular identity understand itself in relation to itself and to others. The more this is done, the more interdependent empowerment is possible. This also allows a larger framework to encompass and transcend particularities in local, national and international governing schemes. While affirming the role of particularity, affirmation and contestation provides an external check on assertions of power and domination by certain particularities over against others. In short, foundations of particular communities that are understood as original and borrowed mean that self-limitation and cross-community solidarity is essential.

Returning to the state of Israel, this can be understood historically as a project that emerges from Jewish particularity and its perceived needs in the post-Holocaust

world. Understanding that the very idea of a Jewish state was argued internally, with great force and passion, and is still argued albeit in a somewhat different language that comes from the radically changed context of there being a Jewish state in existence, the sense that the creation and existence of the state exists in a vacuum is nonsensical. In fact, the perceived Jewish need for such a state, again severely contested in the assertion of need and the forms Jewish empowerment might take in that very geography, directly impinged and impinges on the living and destiny of the indigenous Palestinians and the entire Arab world. While it is clear that the creation and expansion of Israel has been and is a catastrophe for the Palestinians, the use of power by Jews to displace and denigrate the Palestinians has also been a severe trauma for Jewish history and the contemporary Jewish community. Aspects of Jewish particularity that ride roughshod over others have come to the fore—thus the arrival of Constantinian Judaism—while others, especially those Jews who find the center of their being in the prophetic, have been dismissed, hunted and exiled by the Jewish establishment. These exiled Jews of Conscience increasingly find their expression of Jewishness in their solidarity with Palestinians; the degree that this solidarity is real rather than feigned will determine whether the Judaic will survive, in what form it will survive and among whom the carriers of the Jewish prophetic will live.

What does solidarity with Palestinians mean, at least from the Jewish perspective? Honoring particularity, such solidarity is destined to be contested, and is, and fiercely so. This is the reason for the chasm between Progressive Jews and Jews of Conscience—though, on paper, the two understandings might seem closer to one another than either group might be comfortable with. The inclusion of Palestinians in the Jewish vision of the future, in the deep sense that is no longer possible to be Jewish

without living among, with and in solidarity with Palestinians, is one definitive break point between Progressive Jews and Jews of Conscience. Another break is each group's dating when Jews, the Jewish community and the state of Israel went wrong: Progressive Jews citing the occupation and settler movement after the 1967 War as the turning point, thus a return to the 1967 borders more or less solves the problem with Palestinians and the internal troubles within the Jewish community; Jews of Conscience cite the 1948 War, thus the initial occupation and settlements of what became the state of Israel as the place of wrong that devastated Palestinians and the Jewish witness in the world. Here, in the interaction between Palestinians then and now, the Palestinian voice, in its contested understandings, needs to be heard, absorbed and thought through by Jews of all persuasions and taken to heart as a deep and biding indictment of Jewish particularity as it has been expressed in the post-Holocaust period. The voice heard, action must be initiated, as it has been on some fronts. This action includes rewriting the narrative of the history of the state of Israel, with its effects on Palestinians, as well as the lifting up of Jewish voices who then and now point to a radically different encounter in Israel/Palestine.

The Holocaust is another base issue and highly contested issue. Still, there is a difference between arguing about what the Holocaust means and how it has been and is being used in communal, national and international politics, the argument about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and whether in fact the Holocaust occurred. These differences have many ramifications; they point in different directions. Just as the right of Jews to security and a base from which to flourish should not be argued against, but the forms of Jewish empowerment can be and are hotly disputed within and outside of Jewish life, so, too, the Holocaust can be contested in its meaning, lessons and use



but should not—I would say cannot be—questioned as to its historicity. Jewish Holocaust literature is replete with arguments that come from Jewish particularity; the very naming and arguing of the event itself as overwhelmingly or even exclusively Jewish comes directly from a Jewish take on mass death during the Nazi years. Having noted this, and allowing for argued corrections and amendments to Holocaust preoccupation with Jewish suffering often to the exclusion of other suffering individuals and communities, the claim of particularity should be honored as it is contested. Indeed the reasons for contesting the Jewish hold on the Holocaust are important to state and clarify, lest historical and contemporary political arguments that have force within their own right be seen, correctly or not, as an assault on Jews that has nothing to do with Jewish claims on the Holocaust. Simply put, the Jewish monopoly on the discussion and use of the Holocaust should be challenged and engaged on its own merits; Holocaust denial is a thinly disguised way of denying Jews the integrity of their history. It is an assault on Jews and Judaism. Holocaust denial is a form of anti-Semitism, pure and simple.

What then is Jewish particularity for the future? In the first place Jewish particularity will continue to be contested in a variety of ways. However, it is also clear that these contestations will further fracture any sense of Jewish unity around the central defining points of Jewish identity in the present: Israel and the Holocaust. This fracturing has and will continue to send Jews with differing perspectives to places they feel at home in; for Constantinian Jews, their base will continue to be power and affluence in America and Israel; Progressive Jews, tied to the power and affluence of Constantinian Judaism will move closer to their more powerful counterpart or will drift away from Jewish identity, at least in the use of Jewish ethics and values in public discourse; Jews of Conscience will become

an increasing minority in the Jewish world but will become less and less connected with any of the Constantinian or Progressive Jewish institutions that exist today. In short, Jews of Conscience will exercise Jewish particularity in a prophetic way, borrowing freely from the Judaic and other particularities without paying too much attention to forming their discourse in identifiable Jewish ways. This might simply mean the birth of another variation of Jewish articulation or the dissipation of discourse that is traditionally identified as Jewish. In this variation and/or dissipation, Jews of Conscience will continue to be a contesting force within Jewish life and among other particularities that hold to a discourse of injustice. The Jewishly inspired prophetic will thus once again roam free in the world. Whether it is identified as Jewish is less important than the content of the witness of Jews of Conscience; what the next generation will articulate and in what forms is unknown. Is the form important?

Anti-Semitism will continue and it may morph as the Jewish discussion continues to evolve. Yet the assault on Jewish particularity is a rear-guard action that should be seen as an internal discussion within the assaulters on particularity, who, in the end, are fearful of the free prophetic and how it applies wherever its light comes to bear. That contemporary Jewish life is severely compromised and violent should not overwhelm the fact that there are Jews who struggle with their Jewish particularity in our generation. And in the end, it is that struggle, illustrated by my beginning reflections on life lived, contested and sacrificed for, that the narrative is fashioned and bequeathed to our children. From ancient times, that struggle continues; it is from this struggle that a Jewish theology of liberation takes its strength.