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ZIONISM AND POST-HOLOCAUST CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY: A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of the Israel–Palestine conflict tends to focus on politics and history. But other forces are at work, related to beliefs and feelings deeply embedded in Judeo-Christian tradition. The revisionist Christian theology that emerged following the Nazi Holocaust attempted to correct the legacy of Christian anti-Semitism. In the process it has fostered an unquestioning support of the State of Israel that undermines efforts to achieve peace in the region. The conflict in Christian thought between a commitment to universal justice and the granting to Jews a superior right to historic Palestine permeates the current discourse and is evidenced in the work of even the most politically progressive thinkers. The article reviews the work of four contemporary Christian theologians and discusses the implications of this issue for interfaith dialogue, the political process, and the achievement of peace in the Holy Land.

My Encounter with the Pastor

In the Fall of 2006, soon after my return from a visit to Israel and the occupied West Bank, a colleague and I delivered an address at a church in Washington, DC, well-known for its involvement in human rights and social justice causes. The pastor of the church introduced us and listened intently to our presentations. I spoke unreservedly about my horror at the Israeli occupation of Palestine and my ‘conversion’ from a progressive Jew critical of some of Israel’s policies but supportive of the Zionist

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project to someone questioning the very fundamentals of Zionist ideology and practice. After the presentation, the pastor approached me and said: 'I agree with much of what you have said and appreciate your passion and your honesty. But I feel that we have to be sensitive to the feelings of Jews in this matter.' I asked him what he meant by that. He answered in words to this effect:

I have to tell you that as a Christian, I feel personally responsible for the evil of anti-Semitism and indeed for the Holocaust itself. I have been involved in human rights work for my entire career, including for years working with an interfaith group of Christian and Jewish clergy. Until recently, Israel and the Palestinians simply didn't come up. When, however, the issue of the Presbyterian Church's divestment from companies involved in the Israeli occupation was raised in 2004, we decided not to discuss the issue out of sensitivity for the rabbis in the group.

My Jewish pedigree must be impeccable. I looked at him and with what can only be described as *chutzpah*, said: 'Pastor, you need to do something else with your Christian guilt. The rabbis who will not engage with you in an honest discussion about Israel and Zionism are not friends of Israel. We Jews are in spiritual peril, and Israel itself is in grave danger. We need your help as a Christian leader and as a worker for justice and peace. Allowing this discussion to be muzzled and holding back from engagement in this struggle is not what Jesus would want you to do.' The pastor didn't flinch – not by backing off from his position, and not by dismissing my challenge. Our friendship – and our continuing dialogue – began on that day.

The Israel–Palestine conflict pulls all who try to solve it into a quicksand of contradiction and enmity. Sputtering efforts at a 'peace process' to resolve the conflict between Israel and its Palestinian subjects appear increasingly futile to a growing number of stakeholders on all sides. Indeed, the entire effort to achieve a 'settlement' appears to be based on a collective self-deception: while appearing to hold Israel to account, the world powers actually give Israel free rein to pursue policies that breed popular resistance among Palestinians and promise to prolong the conflict. We hear criticisms of Palestinian 'terrorism' and failure to self-govern effectively, but the growth of a healthy society and the capacity to develop competent structures of governance are sabotaged by the unqualified support of Israel's policies of control and annexation on the one hand and the effective creation of third-world dependency status on the other. Although there is increasing recognition of and sympathy with Palestinian strivings for self-determination and political autonomy, acts of popular resistance by an increasingly impoverished and frustrated populace are tarred with the brush of 9/11 and cast as terrorism. Non-violent activism on the part of Palestinians and joint Palestinian–Israeli

organisations are ignored by the media. A civil war has broken out between those US Jews who staunchly defend the Jewish state against all critics and those who fear for its very soul. A powerful, well-organised system of American Jewish institutions – synagogues, Jewish philanthropic federations, political lobbying organisations – move quickly to suppress or neutralise any possible criticism of the Jewish state or threat to the mighty stream of financial and political support flowing to Israel from the United States. The pastor who opens his or her church to a conference on Palestinian human rights faces protests and editorials from Jewish organisations charging anti-Semitism. Powerful Christian Zionist fundamentalists join with the pro-Israel lobby to support the US Administration's sabre-rattling toward Iran. Indeed, in the discourse surrounding the sharing of this narrow band of land, reality is turned on its head: the victorious and empowered seen as victims, the oppressed and dispossessed as the enemies of peace.

How did this happen? How did we get so stuck? To help answer this question, we need to look at the power of ideas that lie at the root of our Western culture. Specifically, we must unpack the modern political – and religious – implications of the original 'parting' of Judaism and Christianity.

A Jewish American's Journey

My grandfather was the direct descendant of one of the great Hasidic rabbis of Europe, a family that settled in Jerusalem in the mid-19th century. As a young man my grandfather left Palestine for America, settling in the bustling immigrant enclave of South Philadelphia and fathering four children, my mother among them. Although my grandfather left the Holy Land, the emotional center of the family remained in Jerusalem. I was born in 1948 – a month before the establishment of the State of Israel. Zionism was mother's milk to me, a Zionism framed in religion. Like virtually every other Jewish child born in the US in the years following 1948, I was taught that a miracle – born of heroism and bravery – had blessed my generation. The State of Israel was not a mere historical event – it was redemption.

I first visited Israel as a boy of 17, and I fell in love with the young state. My Israeli family – religious Jews – warmly embraced me. But even as I embraced them in return, I heard the racism in the way they talked about 'the Arabs'. It was the way that white people talked about blacks in the pre-civil rights Philadelphia of my childhood. I knew then that something was fundamentally wrong with the Zionist project – but my attachment to Israel stayed strong. After college, I lived for a year on a kibbutz, ignoring the implications of the pre-1948 Palestinian buildings

now inhabited by kibbutz members and the abandoned olive groves on the edges of its newly-planted apple orchards. Returning to the US, my concerns about Israel increased in direct proportion to the pace of illegal settlement-building in the territories occupied in 1967. Still, I held to the Jewish narrative: the occupation, although lamentably abusive of human rights, was the price of security. Then I went to the West Bank.

Traveling in Israel and the Occupied Territories in the summer of 2006, I experienced first-hand the damage inflicted by the occupation on the Palestinian people and on Israeli society. Witnessing the separation wall snaking through the West Bank on stolen land, the checkpoints, the network of restricted roads, the massive, continuing construction of illegal Jewish settlements and towns, the vicious acts of ideological Jewish settlers, the terrorising impact of shelling by Palestinian resistance organisations on Israeli border towns, and the effect of militarisation and ongoing conflict on Israelis (especially the young), I realised that, no matter what rationales were advanced in justification of Israel's current policies, these actions would never lead to peace and security for Israel. I saw that the role of occupier was leading Israel toward political disaster, and the Jewish people down a road of spiritual peril. Most of all, I realised that a humanitarian crime was being perpetrated, and in my name. That summer, 40 years after my first encounter with the Land, I saw all that, and my relationship to Israel changed forever.

Contrary to the shrill claims of some of my co-religionists, I do not seek the destruction of the State of Israel. On the contrary, I am in great fear for its peril and want to preserve Israel – its accomplishments, culture, its security, and most of all, its people. I feel horror and deep sadness about the crime that has been committed against the Palestinians, a people that I now know and love. I feel very much like two other Palestinian Jews, the prophet Jeremiah and, eight centuries after him, Jesus of Nazareth, standing before Jerusalem and weeping for the self-inflicted destruction to come. If questioning Zionism and the very concept of a Jewish State makes me an exile from mainstream institutional Judaism, so be it. Protestant theologian Walter Brueggemann in *The Land* writes that “‘exile”, as either history or an ideology, has become definitional for Israel's self-discernment’ (Brueggemann 2002: xvii). Jewish theologian Marc Ellis has written that ‘we must be willing to embrace Jews of conscience who are willing to... go into exile in order to combat the abusive practices of the Jewish state’ (Ellis 2008). I have thus joined the growing ranks of highly identified Jews who, despite charges of being ‘self-hating Jews’, actively question the actions of Israel that purport to advance the cause of Jewish survival. Interestingly, and as witnessed by my encounter with the pastor in Washington, my journey has led to intense dialogue with American Christians and to an exploration of Christian theology and thought in

the post-Holocaust period. I have come to a startling realisation: we Jews are now confronting a theological challenge and identity crisis that bears striking similarity to what happened to Christians in the aftermath of World War II.

A Moment of Truth: Christians Confront the Holocaust, Jews Confront the Occupation

The feelings and convictions expressed that day by my pastor friend have their roots in a broad-based modern movement in Christian theology that originated as a reaction to the Nazi Holocaust. In 1995, Gregory Baum, the Canadian Roman Catholic theologian, wrote about the Church's effort to reconcile with the Jewish people and rid itself of its deeply-rooted anti-Judaism. The problem, states Baum, is that 'if the Church wants to clear itself of the anti-Jewish trends built into its teaching, a few marginal correctives won't do. It must examine the very center of its proclamation and reinterpret the meaning of the gospel for our times' (Baum, in Ruether 1997: 7). Baum ties the impulse to undertake this daunting project directly to the impact of the Nazi Holocaust:

It was not until the holocaust of six million Jewish victims that some Christian theologians have been willing to face this question in a radical way. In his *Voice of Illness*, Arne Siirala tells us that his visit to the death camps . . . overwhelmed him with shock and revealed to him that something was gravely sick at the very heart of our tradition . . . Auschwitz has a message that must be heard: it reveals an illness operative not on the margin of our civilization but at the heart of it, in the very best that we have inherited . . . It summons us to face up to the negative side of our religious and cultural heritage. (Baum in Ruether 1997: 7)

Baum calls this realisation a 'moment of truth'. A similar phenomenon is now occurring in the midst of the Jewish community. Many Jews—academics, theologians, clergy, laypersons—particularly those who have traveled in Israel's occupied territories—have experienced their own 'moment of truth' in response to what they have seen. Like the Christian response to the consequences of anti-Semitism, it is the reaction of a now similarly triumphant, dominant group to the evidence of what their actions have created in the form of oppression, trampling of human rights, and fundamental abrogation of justice, differences in scale and (some) methods notwithstanding. Thus, for an increasing number of Jews, confronting the grim reality of Israel's occupation of Palestine—as well as a growing awareness of the actions that created the state over 60 years ago—has created a personal and collective crisis.

This crisis stands in poignant parallel with the Christian confrontation with the Nazi Holocaust. Ironically, the Christian drive to reconcile with

the Jewish people after the Holocaust is on a collision course with the crisis experienced by those in the Jewish community struggling with the problem of Israel. It is complicated: Christians, in the very midst of their struggle to come to terms with their relationship to anti-Semitism itself, must now also confront the complex reality of a Jewish State. Ironically, political Zionism owes its success in part to the Nazi Holocaust—the same catastrophe that has spurred this radical reevaluation of the foundations of Christianity. Historians have noted the influence of a deeply-rooted Zionism in Christian Europe in supporting Jewish settlement in Palestine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So there are two strains within Christianity, one conservative (Christian Zionism) and one liberal/progressive (interfaith reconciliation). Both are responsible for the tendency to support both the concept and the reality of the Jewish State. Both mitigate powerfully against criticism of Israel. This helps explain the reluctance of many Christians—phobia might be a better word—to call Israel to account for its human rights abuses and its denial of justice to Palestinians. Indeed, although Christians are in the midst of a crisis of faith due to confrontation with the crimes *against the Jews*, this is the very fact that blocks them from confronting the crimes perpetrated *by the Jews*.

Where does this leave contemporary Christians in their commitment to social justice? In our own time, with the question of Israel and Palestine continually in the forefront, what should be the relationship of Christians to the Jewish people and to our national homeland project? To begin to answer this question, I will briefly review the thinking of four contemporary Christian theologians with respect to the issue of the Holy Land and the Jews. I will argue that even in those thinkers whose work has been devoted most fiercely to universalism and social justice, we can detect the struggle to resolve an ambivalent or reluctant Zionism stemming from a theologically-based philo-Judaism and the revulsion over the Nazi genocide.

Paul Van Buren: One Covenant

Paul Van Buren is generally recognised, if not revered, as, to paraphrase a contemporary theologian, a pioneer among Christian theologians committed to repudiating the church's anti-Judaism and putting the church's relationship to the Jewish people on a new footing. (Soulen 1998). Van Buren's work in formulating a 'new revelation' was an attempt to reverse Christian anti-Judaism by bringing the two faiths together within the embrace of a single, continuous tradition. In this effort to undo what he felt were fundamental flaws in Christian theology and to promote Jewish-Christian dialogue and reconciliation, Van Buren attempted to establish God's covenant with the Jewish people as the basis for the

Christian revelation. In the words of another modern interpreter, this reformulation was in the service of ‘the church’s reversal of its position on Judaism from that of anti-Judaism to that of an acknowledgement of the eternal covenant between God and Israel . . . Christianity must refer to Judaism in order to make sense of itself’ (Wallis 1997: 82, 85).

A ‘Progressive’ Christian Zionism?

One wonders if we are looking at a kind of Christian-sponsored Jewish triumphalism in the work of Van Buren. Consider the following passage from a 1979 interfaith symposium, ‘The Jewish People in Christian Preaching’. Why, asks Van Buren rhetorically, should Christian leaders after eighteen centuries ‘turn Christian teaching on its head’ with respect to the Jewish people?

The Holocaust and the emergence of the state of Israel. . . are what impelled them to speak in a new way about Jews and Judaism. It is my judgment that the emergence of the state of Israel was the more powerful of the two, for, shameful as it is to confess it, more than one Christian leader was able to absorb the Holocaust into our traditional theology of the Jews as wandering, suffering, despised souls, paying forever for their stiff-necked rejection of Christ. What could not possibly fit into that mythical picture was the Israelis, holding out and winning their war of independence against the combined forces of five national armies. It is sobering to think that we have first begun to take the Jews seriously when they first started acting like us – picking up a gun and shooting. Nevertheless, the Israeli Defense Force sweeping over the Sinai and retaking East Jerusalem was what could not possibly fit our traditional myth of the passive suffering Jew. The result is that events in modern Jewish history, perhaps as staggering as any in its whole history, have begun to reorient the minds of increasing numbers of responsible Christians. (Van Buren in Fasching 1984: 21)

It is not so much the jarring echo of the mythology of a ‘new Jew’, and the one-sided, triumphalist narrative of the 1948 and 1967 wars – with very little imagination one hears Abba Eban’s vaunting ‘David and Goliath’ speech at the UN in June 1967 – that shocks me as I read this transcript, although shocked I am.² What is more disturbing is the theological

² In fairness to van Buren, the emergence of the body of revisionist history from Israeli (the so-called ‘New Historians’) and Palestinian scholars that has come to debunk the ‘ideology’, in Rosemary Ruether’s (1990) words, ‘of Israel’s wars with the Arab world as wars of necessity and survival’, was still almost a decade in the future when van Buren wrote this statement in 1979. Beginning in the late 1980s with the work of Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, Simha Flapan, Walid Khalidi, Nur Masalha and others and gathering force since then, this work has corrected the 40-year blackout of denial that followed the ethnic cleansing of 1947–9. Sadly, however, the view in the West of Israel’s ‘War of Independence’ exemplified by van Buren’s statements persists to this day and continues to be the basis of philo-Judaic and pro-Israel pronouncements and theology.

undertone, the Old Testament drumbeat, in the appearance of two words in this passage: *Sinai* and *Jerusalem*. The context of Van Buren's statement is not to glorify – or only to glorify – the resurgence of Jewish power and the particular Jewish eschatology of Return. It is rather that now Christians, with theological back-up, can join in this triumph, effectively integrating this historical event into their own eschatology. These events of our time, continues Van Buren, reflect

The will of the holy one of Israel, that the greatest of all love affairs of history between God and God's people continues, but that God provides also a way for Gentiles, as Gentiles, to enter along with the chosen people into the task of taking responsibility for moving this unfinished creation nearer to its completion . . . (Van Buren in Fasching 1984: 21)

In this formulation, being Christian can only happen within the framework of God's covenant with the Jewish people. 'We are gentiles who worship the God of the Jews', writes Van Buren. 'We Christians and Jews really do exist for the sake of the world, and that means also for the sake of the world that is coming' (Van Buren in Fasching 1984: 26). Although the immediate objective of this revision of Christian theology is to rehabilitate the Jewish people, this project carries with it two critical messages with far-reaching implications: (1) It connects God directly to one people – His Chosen – and (2) it carries with it the terms of the original Abrahamic covenant. And can there then be any doubt that the promise of the land is not an integral part, if not a sign, of the approach of this 'completion', and of the sacred bond that unites – or rather re-unites – the two faiths? Are we not seeing here a version of Christian Zionism – minus the Rapture?

In light of recent history, we must question this effort to place the original covenant with the Jews within the container of the Christian redemptive vision. Besides the disturbing ways in which this reformulation is being put to use in the political sphere, this new theology effectively erases core philosophical and doctrinal elements of Christianity. Let us consider an alternative formulation. In the revisionist position, Christian anti-Judaism constitutes an essential element of the faith that must be expunged. The alternative formulation I would like to propose is that the anti-Judaism of the early church is an artifact, an historical accident if you will, not an essential theological or doctrinal element. What is essential in Christianity is the universalism of Jesus' message. Although a poisonous anti-Judaism infected the faith in its formative period, the message of Christianity was not in its essence about Judaism at all, nor about the mission of the Jewish people in God's plan for history. Christianity was directed at all of humankind – in contrast to the exclusivism and self-directedness of the Judaism of Jesus' time. Judaism's vision of history is about the nations flowing to Jerusalem – it is about Zion redeemed, where

Zion is embodied in the earthly Jerusalem as the center of worship of the One God. The Jewish people, naturally, have a role to play in this narrative. But with the coming of Christianity, the idea of a geographical Zion as a center of worship and devotion was replaced by the notion of a 'Heavenly Jerusalem'. Christianity may have sprung from Judaism, but there is a discontinuity, a bright line that differentiates the child from the parent faith in this important aspect. Van Buren and his heirs, by formulating a post-Holocaust, philo-Judaic Christian theology, have essentially blurred this distinction by reviving the earlier, archaic notion of a theology and practice bound to a specific geographical location, with one people elected to play a leading role.³

Van Buren's influence on contemporary theology was significant—generations of pastors were educated in the revisionist tradition. What we are considering, therefore, is no mere exercise in systematic theology. The implications of this reworking of Christian doctrine with respect to the Jewish people are profound. As Van Buren points out, the powerful spectacle of a victorious and prosperous State of Israel lent force and validation to the Jewish triumphalism contained in the new theology. In the political as well as interfaith arenas, the stage was set to make common cause with elements within the Jewish community pursuing their own agenda of establishing a theological and historical basis for the modern-day Jewish nationalist project. Christianity made a wrong turn in the view of many when it threw in with Rome in the 4th century, a mistake that it continues to seek to correct as we leave the 20th century behind. The Jewish people now face a similar choice as we confront the consequences of our own empowerment. Christians, therefore, while honoring the impulse to atone for their own historical sins, must take exceptional care in so doing to not indirectly enable the current sins of the parent faith.

James Carroll: Healing the Rift

'While Judaism exists without essential reference to Christianity, the reverse is not the case. The God of Jesus Christ, and therefore of the Church, is the God of Israel. The Jews remain the chosen people of God. And with this comes the Land.' (Carroll 2001: 566)

³ The characterisation of Judaism as exclusivist in contrast to the universalism of Christianity is of course simplistic. Contemporary interpreters, following in the footsteps of Walter Brueggemann's Old Testament scholarship, continue the important work of understanding the nature of the universalist strands to be found in the Jewish scriptures, the dynamic tension between exclusivism and universalism in Judaism's development, and the relevance of this to the development of Christianity (Galliardetz 2008). Post-Holocaust Christian revisionist theology, however, in its effort to rehabilitate Judaism from its denigration by Christianity, and in reaction to supersessionism, has tended to be simplistic in the opposite direction, by positing the presence of a Christian-like universalism in early Judaism.

These are the words, not of a dispensationalist Christian Zionist, but of a liberal Catholic theologian, James Carroll, in his popular and influential *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*. Christianity, he maintains, falsely established itself not as an outgrowth or continuation of Judaism, but in opposition to Judaism—Judaism was ‘the shadow against which Christianity could be the light’ (Carroll 2001: 119). Carroll borrows Rosemary Ruether’s term ‘the left hand of Christology’ to describe how even the seemingly positive framing of the New Testament ‘fulfillment’ of the Old Testament is an implicit and powerful degradation of the earlier faith and its scriptures. Christianity, he maintains, in establishing itself in opposition to the parent faith, in its earliest narratives and the development of its doctrine distorted the true nature of Judaism. In fact, argues Carroll, in contrast to the picture presented in the New Testament, Jesus was actually in harmony with the Judaism of his time. Carroll’s reframing of Jesus’ relationship to his Judaism is unconvincing. To be sure, there is general agreement that much of early Christian writing bears the taint of anti-Jewish sentiment, attitudes that were driven by contemporary social and political circumstances. But the history of the early Church and its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish communities of the time is just that—history. Carroll’s argument is based on a *post facto* analysis of documents that were the products of those times and that bear only indirectly on the nature of the Judaism and Jewish establishment that Jesus himself was confronting and to which he was speaking. What is more important, Carroll’s solution to the problems caused by early Christianity’s anti-Jewish polemic distorts the discussion of crucial political, religious and sociological issues bearing on the current situation in the Middle East.

Carroll wants to tie Jesus back to the Temple, and, by extension, to the Land. Unsuccessfully, in my view, he makes the case that Jesus’ very presence in Jerusalem as recounted in the Gospels was evidence of his feeling of attachment to the Temple and its priestly cult. In Carroll’s work we see an attempt to reconcile with the Jews for the anti-Semitism of the gospels and the millennia of persecution by washing out the rebellious, iconoclastic, intensely anti-cultic and anti-materialistic nature of Jesus’ message. Jesus was indeed Jewish, intensely so. But is it not so that at the core of Jesus’ Jewishness was his prophetic voice, a voice that, in true prophetic idiom, cried out against the corruption and materialism of the day? Was not Jesus expressing, to use Walter Brueggemann’s term, opposition to the ‘royal consciousness’ that dominated the Jewish political and priestly establishment, and against the exclusivist framework of the Jewish establishment and its theology linked to the Temple and the Land? Might we then go on to say that what Jesus did leave behind was such

a fundamental challenge to the Judaism of his day that, in fact, what ultimately grew from his teachings was something that could no longer be called Jewish? Would not the 'tragic parting', then, have been necessary? And if so, what is this drive to undo this separation, to somehow re-attach Christianity to the very aspects of its Christian roots that are the most non-Christian?

Because this is precisely what Carroll has set out to do: re-establish the Land as the center of Jewish spiritual life, and to then ask Christians to embrace this through their re-imagining of Jesus himself. The Temple, submits Carroll, is not a 'kind of retrograde idolatry . . . the attachment for the land around the Temple as rank imperialism', as some Christians claim. Rather, 'the Temple continues even now—if only the idea of it—as the solitary site of Jewish worship. . . the Jewish hope is rooted not in a mythic never-never land but in a place on earth. Its specificity is the point. The Temple and by extension the land are tied to the unbreakable covenant God has made with his people' (Carroll 2001: 108). In Carroll's telling, Christianity arose out of Judaism in one continuous, developmental process. There was no discontinuity, no break, no parting. For Jesus, he submits, there was only *one* covenant' (Carroll 2001). In other words, so goes Carroll's argument, in order to neutralise the supersessionist dogma that is the source of the Jews' suffering, we must undo that poisonous falsehood and reaffirm God's covenant with the Jewish people.

Carroll is protesting against the anti-Semitism to be found in the Christian narrative. That anti-Semitism is painfully apparent. But why should we reinvent Jesus in order to make up for this, as if we could undo that evil by recasting what is core in Jesus' message, which is that he was bringing something *new*? It was something so new, in fact, such a departure from the tribal, separatist nature of the Israel that he knew, that ultimately there was no turning back from a break with those Jews who would not relinquish that quality of their peoplehood and their special relationship with God. I see Carroll's radical recasting of the gospel narrative as the urgent product of a modern Christian's confrontation with his history, and I honour this act. But to Carroll, and to those Christians who are, in good faith, attempting to heal this wound and to reconcile with my people, I put it to you thus: Say you are sorry for the millennia of persecution. Affirm your sense of connection, even continuity with the Jewish sources of your tradition and your history. Study and honour the treasure and majesty of the Hebrew Scriptures—but let Jesus be Jesus, and be willing to leave the Old Covenant behind. For the path to reconciliation and coexistence with the Jewish people is not

to be found in embracing what was and continues to be most problematic about our tradition.

For all its good intentions, there is a problem with the current—and useful—movement among progressive Christians to re-establish a connection with the Old Testament and to affirm its validity as a sacred body of work on its own merits rather than as a proof text for Jesus' divinity. The problem is that, in the absence of an honest confrontation with certain aspects of the Old Testament theology and world view, this effort brings with it an acceptance of the concept of God's exclusivist, essentially tribal covenant with the Jewish people. The acceptance and legitimisation of this exceptionalist doctrine becomes increasingly problematic as we as a society and as faith communities confront the destructive and self-defeating actions of the State of Israel.

The Need for the Prophetic

Protestant theologian Walter Brueggemann is one of the foremost Bible scholars of our day. He has written extensively on the Old Testament and its relevance to the most urgent of social and political issues. In his 2001 *The Prophetic Imagination*, Brueggemann describes the prophets as itinerant poets responding to the injustice of their times. Brueggemann is quite clear about the direct link between prophecy and politics: 'We will not understand the meaning of prophetic imagination unless we see the connection between the *religion of static triumphalism* and the *politics of oppression and exploitation*' (Brueggemann 2001: 7, emphasis in the original). Standing in counterpoint to prophetic imagination is royal consciousness. Royal consciousness is what drives the structures of power, devoted to their own perpetuation through exploitation and oppression of the masses. According to Brueggemann, royal consciousness depends on the suppression of a moral and ethical sense as well as the denial of a wide spectrum of experiences, chief among them fear and grief: '... royal consciousness is committed to numbness about death. It is unthinkable for the King to imagine or experience the end of his favorite historical arrangements. Royal consciousness consists of and depends upon the denial of pain, fear, suffering. The empire will endure forever—this is the message of numbness and self-deception' (Brueggemann 2001: 42).

The prophets, and for Brueggemann Jeremiah chief among them, mourn for the brokenness of Israel and imminent disaster awaiting their people. But the mourning is not about victimhood—it is about the self-inflicted nature of the disaster to come: 'I believe that the proper idiom for the prophet in cutting through the royal numbness and denial is *the language of grief*, the rhetoric that engages the community in mourning

for a funeral they do not want to admit. It is indeed their own funeral' (Brueggemann 2001: 46).

This was my experience witnessing the occupation of Palestine today and learning about the displacement of three quarters of a million indigenous inhabitants of Palestine to make way for the Jewish state sixty years ago. As the enormity of the crime and the reality of the continuing tragedy became clear to me, shock and horror resolved into a profound sadness and experience of mourning, for both the Palestinians and my own people. It is increasingly clear to growing numbers of Jews—and Christians—here in the US and across the world that Israel's leadership is locked into a destructive cycle of expansion and militarism, a cycle that will never bring peace and security to Israel and that furthermore violates core Jewish values. Brueggemann's description of the situation in the kingdom of Judah in Biblical times resonates powerfully: 'In the time of Jeremiah the pain and regret denied prevented any new movement either from God or toward God in Judah. The covenant was frozen and there was no possibility of newness until the numbness was broken . . . ' (Brueggemann 2001: 56). Indeed, a new covenant is needed, one that will break the logjam of conflict and allow all the inhabitants of the land to live in freedom and security, a covenant in which, in theologian Rosemary Ruether's prescription, Jews and Palestinians can acknowledge each others' pain and achieve 'a compassionate sense of co-humanity' (Ruether 2008). But how can such a renewal be reconciled with the Jewish yearning for a homeland? Brueggemann's own struggle with this question is illuminating.

Land Entitlement to Land Occupation

In *The Land* (2nd Edition, 2002), first published in 1979, Brueggemann wrote about the Jewish people's profound connection to the land of Israel, and the central role played by the land in Old Testament theology. In a profound way, the promise of the land confers identity: 'At the heart of the Jewish experience', he writes, 'is a sense of homelessness and a yearning for home, and its history is the history of being on the way to being home. And this cements the relationship with God. Israel is a people on the way because of a promise, and the substance of all its promises from Yahweh is to be in the land, to be placed and secured where Yahweh is yet to lead it' (Brueggemann 2002: 5). The Jewish people, he writes, 'has never forgotten that its roots and its hopes are in storied earth, and that is the central driving force of its uncompromising ethical faith' (Brueggemann 2002: 20). In Brueggemann's writing here we detect the flavor of post-Holocaust philo-Judaic Christian thought.

Brueggemann's greatness, however, lies in his ability, indeed his drive, to examine his own assumptions and conclusions about the meaning of scripture, scripture which can only be understood in the context of and as a response to human events. Thus, in the preface to the second edition of *The Land*, written 23 years after the book's original publication, Brueggemann is clearly questioning what the land promise can mean, in the light, as he writes, of 'the ideological import of the text as it impacted other people as a necessary cost of Israel's land claims'. In Brueggemann's rethinking of the issue, the theology of promise is reframed as an ideology of entitlement, an ideology that must be questioned.⁴ 'This ideology of land entitlement', he points out, 'serves the contemporary state of Israel'. It is an ideology which is 'enacted in unrestrained violence against the Palestinian population . . . It is clear that the modern state of Israel has effectively merged old traditions of land entitlement and the most vigorous military capacity thinkable for a modern state' (Brueggemann 2002: xv). These are strong words from a theologian who two decades earlier had written about the centrality of the land for the identity and soul of the Jewish people (and, by extension for Christians as the heirs to this Old Testament theology). Brueggemann continues: 'The outcome of that merger of old traditional claim and contemporary military capacity becomes an intolerable commitment to violence that is justified by reason of state . . . That is, *land entitlement* leads to *land occupation*' (Brueggemann 2002: xv, emphasis in original).

Here is the prophetic imagination at work. Military power results from, and indeed reinforces royal consciousness. Brueggemann here is fully in accord with the prophetic requirement to identify royal consciousness, confront its consequences, and bring the people back to a faith centered in social justice and right action. The land may be a central symbol, the source of joy and wellbeing, but as such it must be understood *on this same symbolic level*. When it becomes real – when, to use Jewish Liberation theologian Marc Ellis' term, Judaism becomes empowered – the result is intolerable.

In Brueggemann we see one of the foremost Bible scholars of our day grappling with the theological questions raised by the reality of the modern Jewish state. We witness a similar process, spread across a canvas devoted specifically to the issues of anti-Semitism and the Israel-Palestine conflict, in the work of one of today's most courageous thinkers in progressive theology, Rosemary Reuther.

⁴ Rosemary and Herman Ruether have taken up this issue of Jewish identity and land. Along with other commentators, they hold that in the modern era, with the birth of the Jewish state and 'as Judaism as the basis of religious community erodes for many Jews, activity for Zionism is used to replace Judaism as the basis for Jewish identity' (Ruether and Ruether 2002: 227).

Jewish Exceptionalism: The Slippery Slope

Rosemary Ruether is a Catholic liberation theologian, a pioneer in feminist theology and an outspoken proponent of human rights and nonviolence. In her early work Ruether advanced a radical critique of Christianity, challenging the patriarchal nature of Christian thought and practice. Ruether went on to devote her career to the cause of human rights. It is therefore not surprising that in 1988 Ruether produced *Faith and Fratricide*, in which she turns her attention to the history and theology of Christian anti-Semitism. The book opens with an introduction by Catholic liberation theologian Gregory Baum, who writes a powerful essay about anti-Semitism as a core illness of Christianity. Baum's introduction affirms the theological centrality of the election of the Jews for the fulfillment of the Christian vision of salvation. *Faith and Fratricide* was not intended to address the Israel-Palestine question. But in the course of its argument it validates the Zionist vision and indirectly supports it by reaffirming election as a core theological principle.

Joining other progressive voices in Christian theology, in *Faith and Fratricide* Ruether makes the case that Christians must acknowledge the fundamental anti-Judaism in their doctrine, asserting that acknowledging the damage caused by early Christian anti-Judaism is a central issue for reform in Christian theology. She takes on early Christian anti-Judaism and its dire consequences in the abrogation of Jewish rights throughout European history, taking direct aim at those doctrinal and polemical elements of the New Testament responsible for anti-Semitism. In Ruether's view, the vilification of the Jews in the service of 'Christian self-affirmation . . . has retarded Christian theological self-affirmation', arguing that 'rethinking anti-Judaism' is an urgent task of Christian 'theological reconstruction' (Ruether 1995: 228). *Faith and Fratricide* is a searching, comprehensive, thoughtful treatment of the subject—one would expect Ruether to have written this book. It is in line with her courageous work to peel back to the spiritual core of religion in the service of justice and human rights. Ruether's work has always been about awareness and repentance. She sees anti-Semitism taking its place with the other catastrophic abuses of religion, perhaps as the paramount example of such. Ruether does not limit her work to the reform of Christianity—her approach is, as ever, interfaith and universal, moving toward a joining of the faiths in a spirit of renewal. In this spirit, *Faith and Fratricide* delivers a plea for a new, shared covenant around enduring, shared, core issues—moving the spiritual core of both traditions toward the building of a new, shared covenant.

But it is here that Ruether strays into the same territory as Van Buren and Carroll with respect to Zionism and Israel, albeit in a different way and in the pursuit of a different goal. For this is a generous, inclusive vision that in its very generosity and attempt at balance tends to lend theological legitimacy to the Jewish project of the establishment of a national homeland. Thus, although Ruether is willing to take a direct look at a dark side of Christianity, this is accompanied by a reluctance to shine a critical light on problematic aspects of Judaism— aspects which, I submit, are at very much at work in the abuses of justice and humanity brought about by the Zionist project. Consider this passage from Chapter 5 of *Faith and Fratricide*:

The end of Christendom means Christianity now must think of itself as a Diaspora religion. On the other hand, the Jewish people, shaken by the ultimate threat to Jewish survival posed by modern anti-Semitism, have taken a giant leap against all odds and . . . founded the state of Israel. The Return [sic] to the homeland has shimmered as a messianic horizon of redemption from the exile for the Jewish people for many centuries. But Christianity dogmatically denied the possibility of such a return, declaring that eternal exile was the historical expression of Jewish reprobation. *Now this Christian myth has been made obsolete by history . . .* When viewed from the perspective of oppression in exile, the Return to Israel is indeed a liberation movement and a salvific event for the Jews. (Ruether 1995: 227, emphasis added)

And this:

In Israel, the Jewish people tasted salvation, indeed, ‘the Return to Israel is indeed a liberation movement . . .’ (Ruether 1995: 227)

Ruether here steps out on the slippery slope of Jewish exceptionalism. The ‘Return’, in the form of political Zionism, is effectively granted legitimacy, replete with religious overtones. Anticipating the 1988 *The Wrath of Jonah*, in which she advances a searing critique of modern Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians, Ruether acknowledges that Zionism is a deeply flawed project—yet here the tendency to legitimate that project is clearly apparent. ‘Every criticism of Zionism’, Ruether writes in *Faith and Fratricide*, ‘is not to be equated with anti-Semitism’ (Ruether 1979: 227). ‘Yet there is no doubt’, she adds, ‘that anti-Zionism has become for some a new way of reviving the myth of the “perennial evil nature of the Jews”, to refuse to the Jewish people *the right to exist with a homeland of its own*. *The threat to Jewish survival, posed in ultimate terms by Nazism and never absent as long as anti-Semitism remains in the dominant culture of the Diaspora, lends urgency to the need for the Israeli state*’ (Ruether 1979: 227, emphasis added). This reference to the ‘right’ to a homeland is a

remarkable statement when compared with passages in the later *Wrath of Jonah* that directly challenge this very claim. Notably, in the last chapter of the later book, Ruether, disputing the superior claim of the Jews to the territory on the bases of history, 'ancient memories', and the Bible, takes direct aim at the 'constantly reiterated insistence in *Zionist rhetoric* that other people . . . recognize "Israel's right to exist"' (Ruether: 2002: 230, emphasis added).

The trap of 'balance'

In striking contrast to her position ten years later, in *The Wrath of Jonah* Ruether falls into the trap of attempting to present a 'balanced' perspective on the conflict. She writes: 'There are serious problems, of course, inherent in the taking of the land: 'Jewish nationalism vs. Palestinian nationalism, national security against equality and justice for all. This struggle takes place in a land with a heritage of communal and imperial conflicts, from ancient times to modern colonialism and neocolonialism' (Ruether 1979: 227). In these words we can detect themes that have become familiar in the current discourse about Israel, arguments heard in circles ranging from the staunch defenders of Israel to Jewish progressives guardedly critical of the state. The first is the often-heard call for 'balance' in the discussion. This most often takes the form of a demand for an acknowledgment of the suffering of Israelis as a result of the conflict: 'equal time' must be given to the damages inflicted on both sides. This call is also heard in the requirement to acknowledge the 'conflicting' claims to the land. In other words, the issue is not first and foremost about identifying and addressing oppression and injustice, but rather about the need to mediate between two equally valid claims, between 'two rights'.

The second theme, evident in the above quote from *Faith and Fratricide*, is the notion of a never-ending history of conflict in the region. In this argument, the current conflict is normalised: 'the land has always been a battleground' – so goes the argument – nations and ethnic groups have been fighting over this property for years in a endless cycle of conquest, resistance, and suppression, and this is simply the latest version. Such statements tend to wash out the grim reality of a powerful, militarised state engaged in a long-term campaign of illegal land annexation and the displacement of an indigenous population, a campaign that has been effectively supported and winked at by the West. This the very picture that Ruether would go on to present with such power and clarity in *Wrath of Jonah*, where, in her commitment to moral and historical clarity, she is quite willing to dispense with this imposed requirement for 'fairness' or 'balance'.

It would appear that even the most progressive of Christian thinkers, in seeking to repair the damage wrought by Christianity's anti-Jewish history, reconcile with the Jewish people, and forge a forward-looking new covenant, appear to be pulled back again and again into this defense of Jewish exceptionalism and the Zionist dream. It is as if a stream of philo-Judaism, and with it the yearning for the unity, intimacy and simplicity of the original covenant with its promise of the Land flows just beneath the surface of Christian experience. It takes very little to tap into it, and with that comes the effective legitimisation of Jewish nationalism—an ethos that, ironically, subverts the very universalist principles sought after in this reformist effort.

For Ruether's analysis in *Faith and Fratricide* effectively endorses the heart of the Zionist narrative: The overcoming of the Diaspora becomes the triumph over anti-Semitism. Zionism, even as it is critiqued in the light of events, is elevated to 'a salvific event'. And herein lies the heart of the issue as we strive to understand the Christian response to political Zionism in the light of post-Holocaust revisionism. Ruether has vividly exposed, to use her words, the 'left hand of Christology' in her effort to overcome Christianity's historic denigration of Judaism. But in so doing she has hidden Christianity's *right* hand behind its back. For it was precisely Christianity's lifting of God out of the tribal and into the universal that was the essential, and, I would submit, needed advance for civilisation. The moment that we acknowledge this truth, the Jews lose their special status as God's chosen, and with that the attendant privileges, and join the community of faith traditions as equals. In the Christian vision, we all become part of Israel in the metaphorical sense. Israel becomes, not a tribe, and certainly no longer a nation, but a metaphor for all humankind joined in and through God's love. This, I would submit, is the 'right hand' of the now disavowed Christian concept of supersessionism, or the displacement of the 'old law' with the new: not the denigration of the Jewish people, but the invitation to them to join in this vision of universalism and the overcoming of ethnic and religious divisions in the pursuit of social justice. In contrast, there is here in Ruether's treatment of anti-Semitism a casting of the Zionist yearning in sympathetic terms that continues as a stream in even the most progressive Christian writing, terms that reinforce rather than supersede Jewish specialness and separateness.

Challenging the Power of a Concept

Ruether and her husband Herman have devoted their professional lives to the cause of social justice. It is therefore not surprising that their time living and teaching in East Jerusalem in 1987 and witnessing first-hand the occupation and ongoing colonisation of the West Bank and Gaza

produced a considerable shift in Ruether's thinking. At the height of the first Palestinian Intifada (or uprising), following this time living in Jerusalem, the Ruethers brought out *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. The book presents a comprehensive discussion of the religious, historical and philosophical background of modern Zionism. It is also a clear-cut condemnation of the actions of Israel toward the Palestinians, challenging the very fundamentals of the political Zionist project. *The Wrath of Jonah* is an impassioned plea for the self-inspection and self-criticism that is urgently required of Israel in order to escape the cycle of violence and enmity created by this tragic conflict.

In their analysis of Zionism, the Ruethers go directly to what is in my view the key issue for Jews, namely our perception of ourselves as a people special and apart, and therefore not subject to the same rules as other groups. The Ruethers go to the theological heart of the matter, taking on the issue of Israel's divine election, disputing that it can be used to claim an innate superiority and special entitlement. This is a courageous position, given the prevailing tendency of progressive Christian theology to highlight those very elements of Old Testament theology that tend to lend support to the centrality of Jewish land entitlement.

In *The Wrath of Jonah*, the Ruethers draw the subtle and important distinction between the power of the homeland concept for Jewish identity and the right to use any means to realise it. They do not shy away from a consideration of the history of the conflict. They are particularly pointed, and in my view correct, about the need for a single, coherent story about what happened in 1948 – taking issue with the now fashionable approach of offering two parallel narratives, one Jewish and one Palestinian. Rather, assert the authors, there is one story: that of the determined and indefatigable Zionist programme to establish a Jewish state, and the cruel and tragic dispossession of the Palestinians to make way for it. The Ruethers look to the Israeli revisionist and Palestinian historians to establish that single story, urging that it 'be communicated across the two communities' (Ruether and Ruether 2002: xxiii).

Finally, the Ruethers do not hesitate to wade into the political. They hold Israel to account for the subversion of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord through the continued illegal settlement of the West Bank. The book takes direct aim at the shibboleth of 'Israel's right to exist', naming it – correctly – as 'Zionist rhetoric' that is in reality 'a covert appeal to this religious myth that Jews have an a priori right to exist as a nation in a particular territory' (Ruether and Ruether 2002: 230). In short, *The Wrath of Jonah* takes on frontally the central myths and sacred cows of Zionism, issues almost always avoided by Christian as well as Jewish voices in the discourse out of concern that this will sabotage the chance

for dialogue and a common meeting ground. One need only read the 2002 preface to the second edition of *The Wrath of Jonah*, running a mere 3 pages, for an analysis that is as penetrating and accurate today as it was at its writing over four years ago. Here the Ruethers puncture the myth of the 'peace process', summon up a picture of apartheid and ethnic cleansing, and, disputing that Arab anti-Semitism is at work in fomenting opposition to Israel, name the root cause of the conflict as the 'Israeli scheme of colonial apartheid' (Ruether and Ruether 2002: xiv). Although surely not ignorant of the failures of Palestinian leadership, the authors dispense with the obligatory nod to 'balance' in the discourse, laying responsibility for the failure of peace directly at the feet of Israel and the United States. *The Wrath of Jonah* is a courageous book—it breaks the unwritten rules of our careful, polite interfaith dialogues on the topic—when these dialogues allow themselves to touch the topic at all.

A Post-Zionist Christianity?

I do not believe, especially in view of her most recent writing, that Ruether thinks the State of Israel has brought salvation to the Jews as she asserts in *Faith and Fratricide*. Indeed, in *The Wrath of Jonah* she has taken quite the opposite position, and in the strongest terms. 'We believe', she writes 'that those who care about the Jewish people should support their liberation from a Zionist bondage to Israel as the supposed solution to anti-Semitism. The actual injustices of Israel, and the ideological cover-up of these mistakes, need to be clearly exposed to critical examination. At the same time, the negative energy of disappointment might be transformed into a positive energy of reform, of both Israel and world Jewish institutions' (Ruether and Ruether 2002: 223). 'Zionist bondage', indeed! It is hard to imagine a clearer expression of Ruether's views on the subject. Yet, even in this call for reform, Ruether seems unable to refrain from granting the Jews a special relationship to the land, a relationship that confers entitlement. She continues: 'The break with Zionist ideology might create the new freedom and energy for a broad religious and social renewal of Judaism. It would provide the opportunity for restatements of what it means to be a religiously based and morally concerned global community. This does not mean a rejection but rather a new relationship of world Jewry to the State of Israel, as a political project of the Jewish people'.

I fully endorse Ruether's call for a renewal of Judaism, especially with regard to the future of the State of Israel. Israel is a remarkable achievement. Its people deserve to live in peace and security with their neighbours. The question, however, remains: how can we continue to

pursue our ‘political project’ – to use Ruether’s term – of a Jewish state, while maintaining our commitment to human rights and democracy? It is *the* challenge facing us as a people and as a faith tradition. Moreover, it is a challenge that we face together with Christians, who have been and are the witnesses to our struggle for survival. In view of the political as well as religious crisis wrought by the reality of today’s Israel, the future of Judaism and the Jewish people is as much an issue for Christians as it is for the Jews themselves. Fortunately, courageous thinkers such as Brueggemann and Ruether, even as they struggle to reconcile their commitment to interfaith reconciliation and their confrontation with the realities of the Jewish state, are helping to point the way. Recently, Ruether addressed one of the most sensitive topics to emerge from this crisis. In 2008 she wrote about the Jewish willingness to use the Holocaust as a justification for, in her words, ‘a claim to a unique entitlement of the Jewish people to a state built on Arab land’. ‘Clearly’, she urges, echoing Brueggemann’s imperative to grieve, ‘what is needed is a breakthrough to a compassionate sense of co-humanity, in which Israelis and Palestinians can mourn each other’s disasters and refuse to use one disaster to justify another’ (Ruether 2008).

Judaism’s Shadow

The intractable nature of the conflict in Israel-Palestine and the particularly destructive forms that the struggle has taken demand that both Christians and Jews examine their beliefs, assumptions, and behaviours. There are lessons here for both groups. As Jews, we can lay claim to a long tradition of support for human rights – but today this proud tradition has become tarnished. No matter how many ‘Save Darfur’ banners we display in front of our synagogues and Jewish Community Centers, our support for the human rights of oppressed and persecuted people is tainted as long as Israel pursues policies that deny justice to the Palestinian people and thwart progress toward peace. Psychoanalyst Carl Jung termed the unacknowledged, unexamined aspects of individual and group character ‘the Shadow’. Our Jewish Shadow is our sense of specialness and entitlement, reinforced by millennia of persecution and marginalisation.

Jews of my generation, growing up in the aftermath of the Holocaust, understand this aspect of our cultural identity all too well – and, as such, we have a responsibility to not allow it drive our behaviour. If we love our people, honor our tradition, and seek to preserve Israel and its people, we must confront the evidence of our Shadow in action: the militarism gone amok, houses demolished, land taken, a people humiliated through collective punishment, fundamentalist settlers acting out the will and

design of an expansionist government. We deny this reality at our great peril. For their part, Christians must be ready to confront the extent to which they participate in this denial, actively or passively enabling this injustice to continue. To the extent that Christians, especially on an institutional level, avoid the issue out of personal discomfort or a misguided 'sensitivity' to the past suffering of Jews, or allow themselves to be guided by a theology that supports Jewish exceptionalism, they will be disempowered from taking the actions they would otherwise pursue in their humanitarian missions and social justice work.

Happily, there are signs that the church establishment in the US is taking up this issue energetically. Many congregations have added Palestine to their global mission projects, and organise trips to the region to witness and lend support to the struggle of Palestinians and Israelis committed to justice and coexistence. The Episcopal and Lutheran Churches have longstanding humanitarian and human rights projects in the Holy Land. The Presbyterian and Methodist churches in the US have initiated actions to engage constructively with companies identified as profiting from the Israeli occupation. Recently the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America inaugurated its 'Peace Not Walls' Campaign, providing educational and informational resources 'to learn, pray and act for peace with justice in the Holy Land'. These latter initiatives have provoked intense dialogue and controversy within these church bodies. Despite the discomfort that it engenders, this process is a sign of change and renewal—indeed the discomfort to be welcomed, not avoided, as evidence of the presence of genuine reform.

A Shared Covenant

Christianity came to redefine the nature of God's relationship to humankind and to promote a faith grounded in love and a commitment to human dignity. As such, it builds directly upon the monotheistic revolution of Judaism and the enduring ethical teachings that spring from God's covenant with the Jewish people. In a remarkable and courageous development, post-supersessionist Christian thinkers have rejected the age-old dogma that set up Christianity as the superior faith, with Judaism as, in James Carroll's words, 'the shadow against which Christianity could be the light'. Indeed, Judaism is now held up as the foundation upon which Christianity's fundamental concepts of faithfulness with God, commitment to community, and devotion to social justice are built. Today, however, we Jews are in great peril because of where our nationalistic project has led us with respect to those same fundamental values. Certainly, the Jews are not the only religious group to be guilty of high crimes stemming from the blind, arrogant exceptionalism that religion can breed.

But the urgency of our current situation requires that we apply a laser-like focus on that very quality, a quality that now appears to be driving us. We must demand of ourselves the same humility, courage, and capacity for self-reflection that has been displayed by Christians.

If, as post-supersessionist Christian thinkers are suggesting, we are to revisit the momentous events of the First Century CE, to this Jew it is clear what questions we must be asking ourselves: What was Jesus saying to the power structures of his time—priestly, monarchical and imperial? What was the nature of the parting between the Jews of the time and those who came to be called Christians? We must be very clear, therefore, about the purpose of the interfaith dialogue we undertake. We must call to account those Christian theologians who, in the service of ‘interfaith reconciliation’, and in an effort to rehabilitate Judaism from Christian denigration, are supporting Jewish land claims on theological grounds. It is not enough, indeed it is dangerous, to be content with cautiously designed ‘mutual admiration’ gatherings for appreciating differences and affirming common values, carefully steering clear of topics and issues that might create discomfort or conflict. The times do not permit us that luxury. Rather, in our dialogues we must ask: What can be the nature of the relationship between the faiths today that is faithful to the best in each and that can carry us forward in our shared commitment to justice? What actions—in our families, religious establishments and halls of government—must we take in response to our consciences and to the prophetic voices that speak to us? What, indeed, will be our shared covenant? In considering these questions, let us keep before us the recent words of Rosemary Ruether, who describes Jesus as a prophet espousing a ‘reversal of the social order. . . a new reality in which hierarchy and dominance are overcome as principles of social relations’ (Ruether 2008). If we are to have a new, shared covenant, it must be one that does not look backwards to the archaic and painful past but forward to a day when justice will reign.

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