

Theology and the Palestinian Uprising: a Jewish Perspective

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Some years ago, in an essay outlining Christian complicity in the Jewish Holocaust and the future of Christianity in light of that complicity, the German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz wrote: 'We Christians can never again go back behind Auschwitz: to go beyond Auschwitz, if we see clearly, is impossible for us by ourselves. It is possible only together with the victims of Auschwitz.' When first read this statement strikes one by its boldness, and later by its depth. For Metz, the Jewish victims of Christian triumphalism and power stand before the Christian community, challenging the past but also serving as the key to the future. Of course, Christian and Jew had travelled together on a tortuous and bloody road for almost two millennia before the Holocaust; the present calls for a radically new way of journeying together, one of trust and ultimately of embrace.¹

Over the past months, as the twenty-year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has erupted in a veritable civil war, Metz's statement had assumed a new relevance in a different context. For on the other side of power, the Jewish people have assumed a new and unaccustomed role in relation to the Palestinian people: that of oppressors. As some Christians continue to have difficulty in admitting their complicity in the suffering of Jews, the Jewish people find it almost impossible to admit to their own complicity in the suppression of the Palestinian people. Though Jewish empowerment, mandated by the suffering of the Holocaust, should be affirmed as a good, the present impasse in Israel and Palestine cannot be addressed outside the most obvious, to some the more contradictory, of options: solidarity with the Palestinian people. To paraphrase Metz's statement, the challenge might be stated thus: 'We Jews can never go back behind empowerment: to go beyond empowerment, if we see clearly, is impossible for us by ourselves. It is possible only with the victims of our empowerment.'

Thus the question facing the Jewish people in Israel and the diaspora involves and yet moves far beyond negotiation of borders, recognition of the P.L.O., the cessation of the expropriation of human land and water resources in the occupied territories, and even the public confession of Israeli torture and murder. For in the end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict involves the political, military and economic spheres

of Jewish life while at the same time addressing the deepest theological presuppositions of post-Holocaust Jewry. Without addressing the implicit and explicit theology of our community, any adjustment of political, military and economic borders will represent superficial moments to be transgressed when the opportunity presents itself. Surely, political settlement of any significance in Israel and Palestine without a movement towards solidarity is, by the very nature of the conflict, impossible.

Unfortunately, the normative theology of the Jewish community today—Holocaust theology—is unable to articulate this path of solidarity. Nor can the most well-known of Jewish spokespersons, some of whom helped to create this theology and others who operate within it, speak clearly on this most important issue. There are many reasons for this inability to speak clearly on the subject of solidarity: Holocaust theology, emerging out of reflection on the death camps, represents the Jewish people as we were, helpless and suffering; it does not and cannot speak of the people we are today and who we are becoming—powerful and often oppressive. Holocaust theology argues correctly for the Jewish need to be empowered; it lacks the framework and the skills of analysis to investigate the cost of that empowerment. Holocaust theology speaks eloquently about the struggle for human dignity in the death camps, and radically about the question of God and Jewish survival, but has virtually nothing to say about the ethics of a Jewish state possessing nuclear weapons, supplying military arms and assistance to authoritarian regimes, expropriating land and torturing children.

Though this information is readily available and accepted as documented by the world community, written about or even discovered by Jews in Israel and in the diaspora, Holocaust theologians often refuse to accept it, as if the suggestion that Jews could support such policies, rather than the policies themselves, is treasonable and grounds for excommunication from the community. Because of the power of Holocaust theology in mainstream Jewish institutions, media and organised Jewish religious life, these ‘facts’ are deemed outside of Jewish discourse as *if they are not happening because it is impossible that Jews would do such things*. Thus a community which prides itself on its intelligence and knowledge is on its most crucial issue—the future of our people—profoundly ignorant.²

That is why the dialectic of Holocaust and empowerment, surfaced in Holocaust theology, needs to be confronted by the dynamic and dangerous element of solidarity. Solidarity, often seen as a reaching out to other communities in a gesture of good will, at the same time necessitates a probing of one’s own community. To come into solidarity, knowledge of the other is needed: but soon we understand a deeper knowledge of self is called for as well. If we recognise the national

aspirations of the Palestinian people, that is only a step toward the more difficult and critical question of how Israeli policy has interacted with that aspiration. If we support the struggle of South African blacks, the relationship of Israel and the South African government needs a thorough investigation. What we find today is a powerful and flawed Jewish community which has become other than the innocent victim abandoned by the world.³

Increasing numbers of Jews are beginning to understand that our historical situation has changed radically in the last two decades and that something terrible, almost tragic, is happening to us. With what words do we speak such anguished sentiments? Do we feel alone with these feelings so that they are better left unspoken? Do such words, once spoken, condemn us as traitors or with the epithet, self-hating Jew? Or does articulating the unspeakable challenge the community to break through the silence and paralysis which threatens to engulf us? And those of us who know and empathize with the Palestinians, can we speak without being accused of creating the context for another holocaust? Can we be seen as emissaries of an option to halt the cycle of destruction and death?

This is the challenge which faces the Jewish people. And with it lies the task of creating a new Jewish theology consonant with the history we are creating and the history we want to bequeath to our children. When all is said and done, should it be said that we are powerful where once we were weak, that we are invincible where once we were vulnerable? Or would we rather be able to say that the power we created, necessary and flawed, was simply a tool to move beyond empowerment to a liberation that encompassed all those struggling for justice, including those we once knew as enemy? And that our power used in solidarity with others brought forth a healing in the world which ultimately began to heal us of our wounds developed over the millennia?

Movements of renewal within the Jewish community point the way to this new theology. In Israel, Oz ve Shalom, Religious Zionists for Strength and Peace, argue for the end of the occupation on religious grounds and seek reconciliation with the Palestinian people. Even more to the point is The Committee to Confront the Iron Fist, made up of Israelis and Palestinians, whose first publication carried the provocative title *We Will Be Free In Our Own Homeland!*. Members of the anti-war movement Yesh Gvul, or There Is A Limit, made up of Israelis who refused to serve in the Lebanese War and today refuse to serve in the West Bank and Gaza, are courageous in their willingness to say 'no' to the oppression of others.

North American Jews are increasingly vocal in relation to the pursuit of justice in the Middle East. New Jewish Agenda, a movement of seular and religious Jews, argues for Israeli security and the just

demands of Palestinian nationhood. *Tikkun*, a progressive Jewish magazine, is in the forefront of vocal argument for a new understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian situation. And now, with the recent crisis, mainstream Jewish intellectuals and institutionals have voiced their horror at Israeli policies in the occupied territories.⁴

What these movements represent is a groping towards a theological framework which nurtures rather than hinders expressions of solidarity. It is almost as if a long repressed unease is coming to the surface, breaking through the language and symbol once deemed appropriate. Of course the risk is that if the crisis passes without fundamental change the language of solidarity will recede and the more familiar patterns will reassert themselves. And it is true to state that even the movements cited are often limited in their scope and vision, equivocating where necessary to retain some mainstream credibility.

Still, the drift is unmistakable and the task clear. The theological framework we need to create is hardly a departure, but a renewal of the themes which lie at the heart of our tradition, the exodus and the prophetic, interpreted in the contemporary world. A Jewish theology of liberation is our oldest theology, our great gift to the world, which has atrophied time and again only to be rediscovered by our own community and other communities around the world. A Jewish theology of liberation confronts Holocaust and empowerment with the dynamic of solidarity, providing a bridge to others as it critiques our own abuses of power. By linking us to all those who struggle for justice, a Jewish theology of liberation will, in the long run, decrease our sense of isolation and abandonment and thus begin a process of healing so necessary to the future of the Jewish community.⁵

In this time of crisis, we are encouraged to search for a Jewish theology of liberation requisite to our contemporary situation. The painful confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza is in reality a confrontation with the history we have created. It is a confrontation with who we have become and who we would like to be. If it is true that we cannot go back behind empowerment, we now know that we cannot go forward alone. Could it be that the faces which confront us are those of the Palestinian people and that somehow in these faces lies the future of the Jewish people?

That is why a two-state solution is only the beginning of a long and involved process that demands political compromise and a theological transformation which is difficult to envision. For if our theology is not confronted and transformed, then the political solutions will be superficial and transitory. A political solution may give impetus to this theological task; a theological movement may nurture a political solution. However, a political solution without a theological transformation simply enshrines the tragedy to be repeated again.

Here we enter the most difficult of arenas. For the presupposition that in the faces of the Palestinians lies the future of what it means to be Jewish, that at the centre of the struggle to be faithful as a Jew today is the suffering and liberation of the Palestinian people ... such a thought is *never considered in Jewish theological circles*. At some point, though, an essential integration of Jew and Palestinian in a larger arena of political, cultural and religious life is integral to a Jewish future. But this assumes that a fundamental confession and repentance of past and present transgressions is possible and a critical understanding of our history uncovered.

Neoconservatism and Oppression

Every community has patterns of fidelity and betrayal, points of paralysis and breakthrough. For the Jewish community the issue of Israel and Palestine is central to these patterns and possibilities. Despite the fact that seventy-five per cent of the Jewish people live outside of the state of Israel and that more leave Israel each year than emigrate to it, factors unlikely to change, there is no question that psychologically and theologically Israel remains the centre of Jewish life. Still, it is important to realise that Zionism has always been and remains today a minority movement within Judaism, no matter how Israel-oriented Jewish institutional life has become. As important is the understanding that this orientation toward, even preoccupation with, Israel was and continues to be a highly organized struggle within the Jewish community. That is, Holocaust theology which legitimates this struggle was hardly welcomed by the Jewish establishment of the synagogue, charities or other parts of Jewish institutional life. Holocaust theology threatened and ultimately deprived these traditional centres of their power within the community. Whatever one's perspective, all would agree that identification with Israel has profoundly changed the ethos of Jewish life throughout the world. At the same time it is profoundly altering our perspectives on justice and peace in the world.⁶

Nowhere is this shift more evident than in the progressive theologian and activist Irving Greenberg. In an important and radical analysis of the Holocaust and its implications written in 1974, Greenberg wrote that after the Holocaust 'no statement theological or otherwise can be made that is not credible in the presence of the burning children', and that the victims of the Holocaust ask us above all else 'not to allow the creation of another matrix of values that might sustain another attempt at genocide.' Greenberg affirmed empowerment as an essential aspect of fidelity to the victims of the Holocaust, although he added the proviso that to remember suffering propels the Jewish community to refuse to create other victims.

The Holocaust cannot be used for triumphalism. Its moral challenge must also be applied to Jews. Those Jews who feel no guilt for the Holocaust are also tempted to moral apathy. Religious Jews who use the Holocaust to morally impugn every other religious group but their own are the ones who are tempted thereby into indifference at the Holocaust of others (cf. the general policy of the American Orthodox rabbinate on United States Vietnam policy). Those Israelis who place as much distance as possible between the weak, passive Diaspora victims and the 'mighty Sabras' are tempted to use Israeli strength indiscriminately (i.e., beyond what is absolutely inescapable for self-defense and survival), which is to risk turning other people into victims of the Jews. Neither faith nor morality can function without serious twisting of perspective, even to the point of becoming demonic, unless they are illuminated by the fires of Auschwitz and Treblinka.⁷

By the 1980s Greenberg's understanding of the Holocaust as critique is overshadowed by the difficult task of empowerment. He comments favourably on the re-emergence of American power, applauding Reagan's arms build-up, the stationing of medium-range missiles in Europe, the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative, supporting rebel forces in Angola, the withdrawal of the United States from UNESCO and the continuing funding of the Contras in Nicaragua. Greenberg's emphasis on empowerment allows him to take the high road when analysing Ronald Reagan's trip to Bitburg in May 1985.

Overall Donald Reagan's record in commemorating the Holocaust has been very good. He serves as an honorary chairman of the campaign to create a national memorial. He has held commemorations of the Holocaust in the White House and spoken passionately of the need to remember. His support for Israel—the single most powerful Jewish commitment that the Holocaust shall not recur, the haven where most of the survivors built their new lives—is exemplary. Our criticism of this particular callous misjudgment must not be allowed to falsify the total overall picture, which is a good one. And we shall have to work with him again.⁸

In a revealing theological and political transformation, the ultimate danger has become the prophetic critique of empowerment.

Greenberg is joined in these overall perspectives by the three most known Holocaust theologians, Elie Wiesel, Richard Rubenstein and Emil Fackenheim, and Greenberg's most recent statements concerning the uprising maintain his evolving positions. Though Greenberg now publicly supports an eventual Palestinian state and is somewhat critical

of certain Israel positions his argument remains couched in *realpolitik* with harsh words for moral argument and prophetic critique. That Israeli policies present a critique of overall Jewish perspectives on justice and peace eludes Greenberg, as does the call for a radical evaluation of patterns that have evolved within Jewish life which make the brutality possible. Greenberg does present the crisis as an opportunity for peace in the Middle East. Beyond that there is silence, perhaps a theological inability to move to the heart of the problem.⁹

In a sense Greenberg illustrates the problem which faces the Jewish community at its most basic level. Unless Israel ceases to be a major, isolated and hostile power in the Middle East it cannot but be dependent on American military and economic power. To maintain this role Israel must continue its unannounced policy of helping in the destabilization and underdevelopment of the Arab world, at the same time expanding its global military programme of arms sales and technical training often to authoritarian regimes and right-wing rebel forces. Though surprisingly independent in many areas, Israel, in this scenario, maintains a surrogate role for the expression of Western power. Since Israel cannot through its own resources maintain a major power status or be received in the Middle East within this framework, and since no other Western power is capable of carrying this burden, then America is crucial to the survival of Israel. It is therefore much easier to understand the responsibility felt by the Jewish community in the United States and the increasing impact of Israel on our world view. When United States government aid to Israel surpasses four billion dollars a year and governmental foreign policy decisions and agency cooperation supplies invaluable assistance, and tax-free contributions from Jews to Israel approach the billion mark, how can Jews in the United States be free to choose a different path? Is it surprising that Holocaust theologians, indeed the majority of the Jewish community, becomes increasingly neoconservative in their attitudes and policies?

As we become more and more powerful, the neoconservative trend is buttressed by fear, anger, and by a deepening sense of isolation. Anyone who works in the Jewish community recognizes this immediately, the almost uncontrollable emotional level that criticism of Israel engenders. To be accused of creating the context for another holocaust is almost commonplace, as are the charges of treason and self-hate. Yet on a deeper level one senses a community which, having emerged from the death camps, sees little option but to fight to the bitter end. It is as if the entire world is still against us, as if the next trains depart from Eastern Europe, as if the death camps remain ready to receive us after an interval of almost half a century. This is why, though the entire world understands Yasir Arafat to be a moderate, there is no *other* name linked by the Jewish community so closely to Adolf Hitler.

This is why Prime Minister Shamir spoke of the plans to launch a ship of Palestinian refugees to Palestine as an attempt to undermine the state of Israel, as an act of war. Years after the liberation of the camps, Elie Wiesel wrote, 'Were hatred a solution, the survivors, when they came out of the camps, would have had to burn down the whole world.' Surely, with the nuclear capacity of Israel, coupled with the sense of isolation and anger, Wiesel's statement remains a hope rather than a concluded option. Is it too much to say that any theology which does not understand the absolute difference between the Warsaw Ghetto and Tel Aviv, between Hitler and Arafat, is a theology which may legitimate that which Wiesel cautioned against?

The Occupation is Over

Each morning over the last months we have awakened to reports of torture and death of Palestinian people, mostly children and young men in the occupied territories. But yesterday a strange and disturbing question came to me, as I am sure to many of us: if Palestinians cease to die, will the uprising—at least for North American Jews and Christians—cease to matter? A horrible thought followed: for the Palestinian cause it is crucial that they continue to die in ever-increasing numbers if we in the West are to understand *that the occupation, as we have known it, is over*. Unable to accept this conclusion, I approached a Palestinian acquaintance and a Christian who had just returned from the West Bank: both had the same thoughts. It is true and the Palestinian leadership—as well as the Palestinian villagers—understand this tragic fact. The uprising is dependent on the continuing torture and death of children.

But can Jewish Israelis continue to torture and kill Palestinian children *ad infinitum*? Can North American Jews continue to support these horrible acts? And can Western Christians, especially those who have chosen to repent the anti-Jewishness of the Christian past and who have accepted Israel as an integral part of the contemporary Jewish experience, remain silent on the uprising and Israeli brutality? Or are we all hoping that somehow the situation will dissipate, go unreported, or, better still, disappear? This much seems clear: the willingness of Palestinians to endure torture and death, and the willingness of Israel to inflict such acts of brutality, point to the most difficult of situations which many would choose to ignore: that some basic themes of post-Holocaust Jewish and Christian life are being exposed in a radical and unrelenting way.

If it is true that the occupation of the territories is in fact over, that it has moved beyond occupation to uprising and civil war, then the theological support for the occupation in Jewish and Christian theology must end as well. The focus of both theologies in their uncritical support

of Israel has been shattered. The uprising, therefore, is a crisis on many fronts and is at its deepest level a theological crisis. Of course, like any crisis the uprising presents us with both tragedy and possibility. By uplifting the truth at the price of broken bones and lives, the children of Palestine force us to think again and to break through ignorance, half-truths and lies. But will we have the tenacity and courage in safe and comfortable North America that the Palestinian children have on the streets of Gaza and the West Bank? Or will the inevitable allegations of Jewish self-hate and Christian anti-Jewishness deter us? Are we willing to re-examine our theological presuppositions as particular communities and in dialogue with each other, or will we attempt to pass over the question in silence?

It is not too much to say that that the uprising poses the future of Judaism in stark and unremitting terms. The tragedy of the Holocaust is well documented and indelibly ingrained in our consciousness: we know who we were. But do we know who we have become? Contemporary Jewish theology helps us to come to grips with our suffering; it hardly recognizes that today we are powerful. A theology that holds in tension Holocaust and the need for our empowerment speaks eloquently for the victims of Treblinka and Auschwitz yet ignores Sabra and Shatila. It pays tribute to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising but has no place for the uprising of ghetto dwellers on the other side of Israeli power. Jewish theologians insist that the torture and murders of Jewish children be lamented and commemorated in Jewish ritual and belief. It has yet to imagine, though, the possibility that Jews have in turn tortured and murdered Palestinian children. Holocaust theology relates the story of the Jewish people in its beauty and suffering. Yet it fails to integrate the contemporary history of the Palestinian people as integral to our own. Thus, this theology articulates who we were but no longer helps us understand who we have become.¹⁰

So Jews who are trying to understand the present become a contradiction to themselves while others simply refuse to acknowledge the facts of contemporary Jews life. A dilemma arises: awareness of Jewish transgressions has no framework to be articulated and acted upon; ignorance (albeit preferred rather than absolute) insists that what is occurring is impossible, that torture and murder are not in fact happening at all, that Jews could not do such things. Jews who become aware have few places to turn theologically, and the ignorant become more and more bellicose in their insistence and in their anger. Meanwhile, Holocaust theology continues as normative in the Jews community, warning dissident Jews that they approach the terrain of excommunication and continuing to re-enforce the ignorance of many Jews as a theological prerequisite to community membership.

Christian who have entered into a solidarity with the Jewish people

are similarly in a dilemma. The road to solidarity has been paved both by Christian renewal, especially with regard to the Hebrew scripture, and by Holocaust theology. Understanding the beauty and suffering of the Jewish people as a call to Christian repentance and transformation hardly prepares the community for a confrontation with Israeli power. How do Christians respond now when, over the years, the centrality of Israel has been stressed as necessary to Christian confession in the arena of dialogue, and no words of criticism against Israel are countenanced as anything but anti-Jewish? Too, Christian Zionism, fundamentalist and liberal, is ever present. What framework do Christians have to probe the history of the state of Israel, to understand the uprising—to question the cost of Jewish empowerment? Can Christian theologians articulate a solidarity with the Jewish people which is a critical solidarity, one that recognises the suffering *and* the power of the Jewish people? Can Christian theologies in the spirit of a critical solidarity open themselves to the suffering of the Palestinian people as a legitimate imperative of what it means to be Christian today?¹¹

Clearly the Palestinian struggle for nationhood poses more than the prospect of political negotiation and compromise. For Jews and Christians it presents fundamental theological material which lends depth to the inevitable (though long-suffering) political solutions. Without this theological component a political solution may or may not appear. However, the lessons of the conflict would surely be lost and thus the political solution would tend toward superficiality and immediacy rather than depth and longevity. A political solution without a theological transformation would simply enshrine the tragedy to be repeated again. An important opportunity to move beyond our present theologies of solidarity, which may usher in a new age of ecumenical cooperation, would be lost. Could it be that the struggle of the Palestinian people—their struggle to be faithful—is a key to the Jewish and the Christian struggle to be faithful in the contemporary world?

The torture and death of Palestinian children calls us to a theology which recognizes empowerment as a necessary and flawed journey toward liberation. It reminds us that power in and of itself, even for survival, ends in tragedy without the guidance of ethics and a strong sense of solidarity with all those who are struggling for justice. Today, the Palestinian people ask the fundamental question relating to Jewish empowerment: can the Jewish people in Israel, indeed Jews around the world, be liberated without the liberation of the Palestinian people? Once having understood the question posed by the Palestinian people, the occupation can no longer continue. What remains is to build a theological framework which delegitimizes the torture and the killing—a theology of liberation which sees solidarity as the essence of what it means to be Jewish and Christian.

A New Theological Framework

The development of a theological framework is crucial to delegitimize torture and murder—that is, to ending theologies which promote a myriad of occupations including, though not limited to, the Palestinian people. In this case we focus on the Israeli occupation as the breakthrough point for Jewish theology. The theological framework which legitimates occupation also, if we look closely, forces us to take positions on other issues which would be questioned, even abhorred, if the framework was different. If our theology did not support the occupation, its vision of justice and peace would be transformed. Thus we turn again to the prospect that the uprising represents a culmination and a possibility, if we only seize the moment.

An essential task of Jewish theology is to deabsolutize the state of Israel. To see Israel as an important Jewish community among other Jewish communities, with an historical founding and evolution, is to legitimate theologically what the Jewish people have acted out with their lives: the continuation of diverse Jewish communities outside the state. Thus the redemptive aspect of Jewish survival after the Holocaust is found in a much broader arena than the state of Israel, and must be critically addressed rather than simply asserted in unquestioning allegiance to a state where most Jews do not live. Deabsolutizing Israel hardly means its abandonment. Instead it calls forth a new, more mature relationship. Jews cannot bilocate forever and the strain of defending policies implemented by others, of criticizing without being able to influence directly, of supporting financially and being made to feel guilty for not living in Israel, is impossible to continue over a long period of time. With this new understanding responsibilities between Jewish communities assume a mutuality which includes a critical awareness of the centrality of our ethical tradition as the future of our community. Therefore, the present crisis and any future crisis move beyond the call for unquestioned allegiance to or disassociation from Israel to a critical solidarity with responsibilities and obligations on all sides.¹²

A second parallel task is to deal with the Holocaust in its historical context and to cease applying it as a possible future outcome to issues of contemporary Jewish life. The constant use of the Holocaust with reference to Israel is to misjudge and therefore refuse to understand the totally different situation of pre- and post-Holocaust Jewry. Pre-Holocaust European Jewry had no state or military; it was truly defenceless before the Nazi onslaught. Israel is a state with superior military ability. Pre-Holocaust European Jewry lived among populations which varied in their attitudes towards Jews from tolerance to hatred. Post-Holocaust Jewry, with its population concentrations in France, England, Canada and the United States, resides in countries where anti-Jewishness is sporadic and inconsequential. Pre-Holocaust Jewry lived

among Christians who had as a group little reason to question Christian anti-Jewishness. Post-Holocaust Jewry lives among Christians who have made repeated public statements, writings, even ritual affirmations of the centrality of the Jewish people and Christian culpability for an anti-Jewish past. The differences between pre- and post-Holocaust Jewry can be listed on many other levels as well, which is not to deny that anti-Jewishness continues to exist. As many Jewish writers have pointed out, the paradox is that the most dangerous place for Jews to live in today is the state of Israel rather than centres of Europe and North America.

Even in relation to Israel the application of Holocaust language is clearly inappropriate. Israel has been involved in two wars since 1967 and has won neither; no civilian life was taken outside the battlefield. The great fear, repeated over and over again, is that one day Israel will lose a war and that the civilian population will be annihilated i.e., that there will be another holocaust. Two points are important here. First, if the situation continues as it is today it is inevitable that one day Israel will lose a war and face the possibility of annihilation. No nation is invincible forever, no empire exists that is not destined to disappear, no country that does not, at some point in its history, lose badly and suffer immensely. Can our present theology exempt Israel from the reality of shifting alliances, military strategies and political life? *The only way to prevent military defeat is to make peace when you are powerful.* Of course, even here there is never any absolute protection from military defeat, as there is never any absolute protection from persecution. But if military defeat does come and if the civilian population is attacked the result, though tragic, will not be, by any meaningful definition, another holocaust. And it would not, by any means, signal the end of the Jewish people, as many Holocaust theologians continue to speculate. It would be a terrible event, too horrible to mention, except for a clarification crucial to its prevention. And perhaps the differences between the Holocaust and any future military defeat of Israel are too obvious to explore, and would hardly need exploration if our present theology was not confused on this most important point.

To deabsolutize the state of Israel and distinguish the historical event of Holocaust from the situation of contemporary Jewish life is imperative to the third task of Jewish theology, the redefinition of Jewish identity. This is an incredibly difficult and complex task whose parameters can only be touched upon here. Yet it is the most crucial of areas, raising the essential question that each generation faces: what does it mean to be Jewish in the contemporary world?¹³

There is little question that Holocaust theology is the normative theology of the Jewish community today and that at the centre of this theology is the Holocaust and the state of Israel. Rabbinic theology, the normative Jewish theology for almost two millennia, initially sought to

continue as if neither the Holocaust nor the state of Israel were central to the Jewish people, and Reform Judaism, the interesting but sometimes shallow nineteenth-century attempt to come to grips with modern life, also sought to bypass the formative events of our time. Yet to survive after the Holocaust and especially since the Six Day 1967 War both theological structures have been transformed with an underlying Holocaust theology. Secular Jews, as well, often affiliated with progressive politics and economics, have likewise experienced a shifting framework of interpretation. Though not explicitly religious, their aid has been solicited by Holocaust theologians to build the state of Israel as *the* essential aspect of belonging to the Jewish people. In sum, both those who believed in Jewish particularity and those who sought a more universal identification have increasingly derived their Jewish identity within the framework of Holocaust and Israel. And there is little reason to believe that any of these frameworks—Orthodox, Reform, or secular humanism—can ever again return to their pre-Holocaust, pre-Israel positions.

We can only move ahead by affirming the place of Holocaust and Israel as important parts of Jewish identity while insisting that they are not and cannot become the sum total of what it means to be Jewish. The point here is to take the dynamic of Holocaust and Israel and understand it in new ways. In both events there is, among other things, an underlying theme of solidarity which has been buried in our anger and isolation. This includes solidarity with our own people as well as others who have come into solidarity with us. As importantly, if we recover our own history, there is a theme of Jewish solidarity with others even in times of great danger. The latter includes some of the early settlers and intellectuals involved in the renewal of the Jewish community in Palestine, well-known figure like Martin Buber, Albert Einstein, Hannah Arendt and many others.¹⁴

Even during the Holocaust there were voices, especially ones like Etty Hillesum, who argued that their suffering should give birth to a world of mutuality and solidarity so that no people should ever suffer again. Hillesum, who voluntarily accompanied her people to Auschwitz, was hardly a person who went like a lamb to her slaughter. Rather she chose a destiny as an act of solidarity with her own people and the world. Is it possible that those who affirmed human dignity where it was most difficult and those who argued, and continue to argue today, for reconciliation with the Palestinian people even with the risks involved, represent the only future worth inheriting and bequeathing to our children? By emphasizing our dignity and solidarity we appropriate the event of Holocaust and Israel as identity-forming in a positive and critical way. Thus they ask us to once again embrace the world with the hope that our survival is transformative for our own people and the world.

The key to a new Jewish identity remains problematic unless we understand that deabsolutizing Israel, differentiating Holocaust and the contemporary Jewish situation, and recovering the history of solidarity within our tradition and with those outside it, leads us to a critical confrontation with our own empowerment. To celebrate our survival is important; to realize that our empowerment has come at a great cost is another thing altogether. Can we at the fortieth anniversary of the state of Israel realise that the present political and religious sensibilities can only lead to disaster? Can we argue openly that the issue of empowerment is much broader than an exclusive Jewish state and that other options, including autonomy with confederation, may be important to contemplate for the fiftieth anniversary of Israel? Can we openly articulate that as American Jews we can no longer ask American foreign policy to support policies which contradict the ethical heart of what it means to be Jewish? Can we say with Michael Lerner, editor of *Tikkun*: 'Stop the beatings, stop the breaking of bones, stop the late-night raids on people's homes, stop the use of food as a weapon of war, stop pretending that you can respond to an entire people's agony with guns and blows and power. Publicly acknowledge that the Palestinians have the same right to national self-determination that we Jews have and negotiate a solution with representatives of the Palestinians!'¹⁵

This was a luncheon address given on the 22 April in the United States, at Emory University, under the title 'Theology, Politics and Peace in Light of the Uprising: A Jewish Perspective'.

- 1 Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p.19. For a detailed discussion of this new way of journeying together see Marc H. Ellis, *Towards a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987), pp.67–90.
- 2 For an extended discussion of Holocaust theology see Ellis, *Jewish Theology*, pp.8–24.
- 3 On the interaction of Israeli policy and the Palestinian people see Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht, *The Fate of the Jews: A People Torn Between Israeli Power and Jewish Ethics* (New York: Times Books, 1983), pp.219–288. For the relationship of Israel and South Africa see Jane Hunter, *Undercutting Sanctions: Israel, the U.S. and South Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Middle East Associates, 1986).
- 4 Ezra Goldstein and Deena Hurwitz, 'No Status Quo Ante', *Agenda* 24 (Spring 1988): 1,3; Michael Lerner, 'The Occupation: Immoral and Stupid', *Tikkun* 3 (March/April 1988): 7–12; Theodore R. Mann, 'We Must', *Moment* 13 (March 1988): 18–22.
- 5 See Ellis, *Jewish Theology*, pp.110–122.
- 6 For the shift of power within Jewish institutional life see Irving Greenberg, 'The Third Great Cycle in Jewish History', *Perspectives* (New York: National Jewish Resource Center, 1981), pp.32–33. On the altering of perspectives relating to this shift see an analysis of Greenberg in Ellis, *Jewish Theology*, pp.26–37.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity After the Holocaust', in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* ed. Eva Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), p.22.

- 8 Ibid., 'Some Lessons from Bitburg', *Perspectives* (May 1985), p.4. For Greenberg's political positions see *ibid.*, 'On the Third Era in Jewish History: Power and Politics', *Perspectives* (New York: National Jewish Resource Center, 1980), p.6 and *ibid.*, 'Power and Peace', *Perspectives* 1 (December 1985): 3,5.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 'The Ethics of Power', in publication (March 1988).
- 10 For an extended discussion of Holocaust theology see Ellis, *Jewish Theology*, pp.7–24.
- 11 An example of liberal Christian Zionism is found in the work of Paul M. van Buren. See *A Christian Theology of the People Israel* vol. 2 (New York: Seabury Press, 1983). For my discussion of developing a critical solidarity see Ellis, *Jewish Theology*, pp. 119, 120. This analysis points to a new ecumenical dialogue based on solidarity in the struggle for liberation rather than the status quo of Christian and Jewish institutional life.
- 12 The strains of this highly problematical and emotional relationship have increasingly come to the surface in recent years. Witness the upheavals in North American Jewish life relating to the Lebanese War, the massacres at Shabra and Shatila, the Pollard Spy Case and now the Uprising. My point is simply that the relationship between Jews in Israel and Jews outside of Israel cannot remain as it is without ultimately dividing the community at its very roots.
- 13 This ability to discuss the issue of Jewish self-identity assumes the possibility of moving beyond the typical epithet of being a self-hating Jew.
- 14 For Hannah Arendt's prophetic understanding of the choices facing the Jewish settlers in Palestine see a collection of her essays *Hannah Arendt; The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Grove Press, 1978).
- 15 Michael Lerner, 'The Occupation', p.7

Thomas Aquinas and the Real Distinction: a re-evaluation

Montague Brown

Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of the real distinction between essence and existence in all beings other than God has been the focus of much debate among Thomists. And this is how it should be, for all agree to its central importance in Aquinas's metaphysics. Is the distinction a deduction we make from our knowledge of God's essence, or an insight drawn from our experience? And if it is the latter, is this insight from multiplicity to unity based on the inevitable mental distinction we draw between the concept of essence and that of existence, or is it the fruit of a metaphysical penetration of the material things we meet within our world? Let us look first at the argument based on an intuition into God's simplicity and a deduction from that intuition, and then turn to an

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