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# Introduction: A Bully in Christchurch

A short while ago I flew into Christchurch from Sydney, Australia, the last stop on a worldwide speaking tour I called 'Quest for Justice'. I had been lecturing on the Israel/Palestine issue in light of the recent Al-Aqsa intifada, first in the United Kingdom, Germany and India, then on to Australia and New Zealand, seeking to raise consciousness on the Israeli violation of the human and national rights of Palestinians.

As a Jew born in the U.S. and steeped, like other Jews of my post-Holocaust generation, in an ethic of fair play and justice, I have been distressed by the continuing and escalating belligerence of Israel. The use of Israeli helicopter gunships against defenceless Palestinian cities, towns, villages and refugee camps angered me. I could not remain silent.

Indeed, I have begun to see that these very machines whose sole purpose is one of destruction and death have come to define contemporary Jewish life. In my mind's eye, I have a vision of replacing the Torah scrolls in the Ark of the Covenant, that focus Jews on God, justice and peace, with a helicopter gunship that speaks of power and might without ethics or morality. What we do, we worship.

Thus the speaking tour. In the course of two months I addressed dozens of audiences on this subject and can recall only a few instances of audience members attempting to disrupt my presentations. In fact, the overwhelming sense that I came away with from this tour is that people around the world are deeply concerned about the behavior of the Israeli government. They also have deep fears about what is happening to the Palestinians.

During this tour, I addressed several Jewish organizations, including a meeting of Liberal rabbis in the United Kingdom, a Jewish organization in Melbourne and a Jewish Studies class at New South Wales University in Sydney. I also met with a number of Jews in the countries I visited, including Israeli Jews, and the concern is shared: Have we as Jews become an oppressor nation? Have the lessons of the Holocaust, which we teach religiously to everyone in the world, been

lost to us? Is the threat and use of power and might – by helicopter gunships hovering over Palestinian skies by day and firing their rockets by night – the legacy we want to bequeath to our children?

Speaking tours like these are long and arduous, with much travel and little sleep. Yet they are also rewarding. As a Jew I witness discussions of depth and emotion with other Jews, with non-Jews who have a love for the Holy Land, and of course, with Palestinians whose lives and families are involved, most often in negative ways, with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

Though the rewards are many, the jarring notes are what I remember most, the verbal and non-verbal confrontations, most often with Jews, who remind me that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is central to Jewish history and to the Jewish future.

At the University of Canterbury in Christchurch I had one such encounter. On the first day of the visit, I was asked to attend a class with a visiting Jewish Israeli scholar and political activist, Yossi Olmert. After the lecture we had lunch. That evening I was scheduled to appear with him on a panel addressing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

It turns out that Dr. Olmert is the brother of the mayor of Jerusalem, Ehud Olmert; both are nationalists and to the right of the Israeli political spectrum in the mode of Menachem Begin, Benjamin Netanyahu and Ariel Sharon. The Israeli embassy in New Zealand had brought Olmert to New Zealand as part of his more extensive tour of Asia and the Pacific. These tours attempt to counter the negative publicity that has surfaced during Israel's military campaign to quell the Al-Aqsa intifada.

Olmert began his morning lecture on the Israeli–Arab conflict with reference to the wider Middle East region. He correctly pointed out the need for knowledge of the broader context that impacted the relatively small area of Israel/Palestine. What is interesting about this wider context, at least as Olmert analysed it, are the problems in Israel's 'neighborhood'. According to Olmert, the main factors in the Middle East are overpopulation, underdevelopment, lack of democracy and Islamic fundamentalism, a potent mixture that reinforces a cycle of violence illustrated by the Iraq–Iran War in the 1980s, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in the early 1990s and a spiraling arms race which continues to make the Middle East the most heavily armed region in the world.

Olmert lamented these facts, pointing out the debilitating wastefulness of violence and war, but what surprised me was the

superficiality of his analysis. The entire Middle East was summed up in generalities, almost without a sense of differentiation and particular contexts. Overriding the details, and even the generalities, was a sense of failure on the part of the Arab nations, almost a sense of destiny in their tendencies toward instability, dictatorship and terrorism.

As the class continued on, the Israeli–Palestinian focus was addressed. As a nationalist and self-proclaimed right-winger, Olmert claims the land of Israel to include not only Jerusalem but the West Bank as well, a region he refers to as Judea and Samaria. The Greater Land of Israel is indeed Olmert's claim, as the biblical promise and the early claims of Israel and the land are seen to be in force. That Palestinians have always lived in these areas is for Olmert an inconvenient factor perhaps derailing, at least for now, the complete fulfillment of this claim. In no way does it provide Palestinians with a claim rivaling the one he makes for Jews.

As for Jerusalem, the city whose destruction Jews continue to lament and to whose return they prayed for more than two thousand years of diaspora, the Jewish claim is non-negotiable. Palestinians have rights to pray at the mosques in Jerusalem; their rights end there. As for the assassinations of Palestinians, a freely-admitted policy of the Sharon government carried out through the diverse means of detonated cell phones and helicopter gunships, Olmert was firm in describing these acts as reprisals for terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians. They are not only justified, they should continue and perhaps even be accelerated.

What is remarkable about Olmert is not his ideas. He combines the superficial analysis of the Arab world and simplification of Jewish rights to the land of Israel/Palestine that have become commonplace in nationalist right-wing circles in Israel over the last decades. Though Olmert was careful to distance himself from the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, an event he described as shameful, I felt his analysis was quite close to Yigal Amir, Rabin's assassin. Amir speaks of Arabs and Palestinians in ways not too dissimilar to Olmert's own rhetoric.

Indeed, as the class continued with a lively question-and-answer period, Olmert became more and more animated and sweeping in his generalizations. Arabs and Muslims were defined in increasingly negative terms and outsiders to the Middle East, including New Zealanders and Americans – not exempting Jews who live outside Israel – were taunted for daring to suggest to Israel ethical and moral

alternatives to their present behavior. These 'outsiders' always criticized Israel but did not live in their 'neighborhood' and did not pay the price in blood and tears. Israel and the Palestinians should go it alone, and the suggestion that Israel is within an international system of nation-states with laws and obligations, and dependent on the United States for financial and military support, was dismissed with disdain.

This disdain struck me as essential to Olmert's world-view. As the evening panel discussion drew near, I feared this would result in an uneven discussion in which the very principle of the centrality of justice and ethics to Judaism and Jewish life would be characterized as utopian and derided as silly. Or as a recipe for disaster for Israel and Jews who lived within her borders.

After all, isn't every violation of order and decency in the Middle East a violation by Arabs who, if they had the power, would drive the Jews into the sea? Isn't that the aim of every Arab on the street and every Arab government from now until the end of time? Aren't moral arguments made on behalf of the Palestinians actually hypocritical, veiled attacks that carry the ominous prospects of another Holocaust? Am I, with others who criticize the Jewish state, contributing to a gathering storm of violence and retribution that might result in a catastrophe for Jews approaching or even surpassing the mass death of Jews in the twentieth century?

As it turned out, my fears for the integrity of the panel discussion were unfortunately realized. Olmert dominated the discussion as if it were a solo lecture. Not only did he speak far longer than his allotted time, he resisted any attempt to stop him. As his orations grew longer, his vehemence increased.

Olmert seemed obsessed with the era before the 1967 Israeli-Arab War when Jordan occupied east Jerusalem, and the Wailing Wall, the last remaining remnant of the ancient Jewish Temple, was littered with trash and urinated on by animals. Today, of course, Jews dominate this part of Jerusalem and guarantee the freedom of Muslims to worship. But to the question of what freedom is accorded Muslim worshipers when Jerusalem is inaccessible to Palestinians who live outside the city and when the Palestinian population of the Old City is systematically depleted, Olmert, whose brother implements these policies of restricted access and demographic change, simply reiterated in a more insistent voice the charges of Arab desecration of Jewish holy sites.

With the evening ended, I returned to the home where I was staying. I reflected on the discussion and felt almost as if I had been physically violated. Was I smarting because of his debating skills, indeed his street-fighting ways, so typical of vocal and animated Israelis? Had I lost the war of words and now, upon my retreat, been forced to lick my open wounds?

In the morning I had another sense of the previous evening. Rather than by debating skills or truth telling, Olmert had dominated me and the audience with bully tactics. This understanding of Olmert as a bully, remembering that bullies, absent their entourage or, in the case of Israel, an overwhelming arms advantage, are essentially cowards, forced me to a deeper level of sadness with regard to Israel and its future. All Israelis are not bullies to be sure, but why was he brought on this speaking tour by the Israeli embassy? Why was an official from the embassy present and why did she seem so pleased with his words?

In his summation, Olmert again characterized Jewish and non-Jewish dissent from outside Israel as destructive and counterproductive and referred to my criticism in a derogatory way. Among his criticisms one phrase stands out to me: 'He doesn't even speak our language.'

This struck me as an especially hurtful comment, at least initially, but upon reflection Olmert is more correct than he even proposed. As a youngster I learned liturgical Hebrew and can read and write Hebrew in that style. For most of Jewish history Hebrew has been precisely that, a liturgical language of beauty and depth. With the formation of the state of Israel, Hebrew became a modern spoken language with many variations and adaptations. As with most Jews who live outside of Israel, I do not speak that language. According to Olmert, this makes my commitment to Judaism and Jewish life questionable. Real Jews, apparently, live in Israel and argue for the positions he does.

I had the sense that Olmert would have treated a progressive Israeli panelist the same way that he treated me. That very day the progressive Jewish Israeli peace group, Gush Shalom, asked the international community to send a peace force to monitor the situation in the occupied territories and to protect Palestinians from Israeli aggression. Are they less Jewish than Olmert? Are they Jews who, though speaking modern Hebrew, also don't speak 'our' language?<sup>1</sup>

I wonder if the defining character of Olmert's language is Hebrew or its bullying nature. Is this the innovative aspect of modern

Hebrew in its transposition from the liturgical sphere to the nation-state, that it is used less as a praise of God's presence than as an instrument to project state power? Can this humble language be now summed up in a militarism that sanctions the use of helicopter gunships as a way of teaching lessons to a defenceless people?

Indeed, I do not speak Olmert's language and do not wish to. I wonder if Olmert, being secular and leaving behind the ethical and justice-oriented commandments of Judaism and adopting the ways of the nations, represents the arrival of Hebrew-speaking Gentiles. Am I part of a remnant of non-Hebrew-speaking Jews, a community that seeks an interdependent empowerment of Jews and Palestinians, thus recognizing our own rights and the rights of others? Is 'our' language spoken with such vehemence – the language of power and might – that it marks a return to the Jewish ghetto mentality, now armed with nuclear missiles, a nuclearized ghetto, if you will? Does this other language typify a renewed engagement with the world in which Jews, when powerful and despite the Holocaust, can also commit crimes against others?<sup>2</sup>

My encounter with Olmert was just a month before the September 11th attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. For many these attacks simply reinforced his position, that there is a link between Arabs and terrorism, a connection Israel knows well. For some the lessons that Olmert seeks to impart are now 'our' lessons. Others believe that we now need to adopt the language of violence and retribution as the only language 'we' and 'they' understand.

I view this encounter with the 'bully in Christchurch' as a window into the Jewish world *as it has evolved over the last decades*. With the evolution and expansion of state power in Israel and the accelerated empowerment and achievement of elite influence in the United States, Jewish life around the world has been mobilized and militarized.

This trajectory, however, has often been misunderstood, characterized in fundamentalist religious terms and blamed on right-wing religious Jews in settlement movements around Jerusalem and the West Bank. Though they are not without blame – they certainly make worse the already difficult situation – Jewish fundamentalists are latecomers to Israel and the Jewish world.

Olmert is a fellow traveler to Jewish religious fundamentalists, but likewise a latecomer. In fact, Israel and its continuing expansion are impossible to understand outside the liberal-European-secular Jewish

narrative that promoted its creation and its consolidation as a nation-state.

This narrative combines a European context – a Jewish minority at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century that clearly saw the difficulties, if not impossibility, of Jewish life flourishing in modern Europe – with an evolving post-Holocaust consciousness that, especially in the U.S. after the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, commemorates the Holocaust and understands Israel as compensation for suffering and a guarantor of Jewish survival. If we label the European Jewish context ‘Zionism’ and the American Jewish context ‘Holocaust/Israel’, we capture the central movements for the establishment and maintenance of Israel.

Clearly both Zionism and Holocaust/Israel identification in their origins and continuity are complex and diverse. Historically, there have been Zionisms, from state Zionism to homeland Zionism and variations in between. Holocaust/Israel identification was weak in the 1950s and 1960s but strong during the late 1960s and 1970s. Today Zionism has been overshadowed by Holocaust/Israel identification, as advanced by American Jewish economic and political elites.

The important point here is that in both Europe and the U.S. the main engines of Zionism and Holocaust/Israel identification have been decidedly secular, although in a particularly Jewish way. Here secularity can include devotion to the Jewish people, a reading of the bible as an ongoing historical narrative, and a sense of historical destiny that includes nationality and peoplehood.

At the same time, the development of Zionism and Holocaust/Israel identification should be seen within an evolving liberal, sometimes socialist and often times non- or anti-religious sensibility. The founders of Israel were decidedly secular and progressive in the European framework. They were driven by an ethic they identified as Jewish in the broadest sense: they saw themselves as internationalists in the humanist cause. Those who pioneered the Holocaust/Israel narrative in the U.S. were Jewish in sensibility and religious only in the broadest sense of the term. They, too, were liberal, espousing civil rights and a society open to all.

The appeal to the larger Jewish community after the Holocaust was precisely because Orthodox Judaism made little sense to the Jewish community in the U.S., both because of the effects of modernity and the religious questions posed by the severity of the Holocaust. While those who reflected on the Holocaust could not agree on the presence of God during and after the Holocaust, they

could agree that the central religious tasks of Jews after the Holocaust were remembering the Holocaust and building the state of Israel. In 1968, Emil Fackenheim, the Canadian philosopher, wrote of this commitment as the 614th commandment, adding to or perhaps supplanting the 613 commandments of traditional Jewish religious life.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to understand how the success of state Zionism and the intensification of the Holocaust/Israel narrative in the U.S. laid the groundwork for a secondary, though increasingly important, religiously extreme settler movement, in tandem with a secular extreme nationalism, after the 1967 war. It was not until this period, on the heels of the capture and annexation of east Jerusalem and occupation and settlement of the West Bank, that what we now call Jewish fundamentalism came to fruition.

Jerusalem has obvious significance to both religious and secular Jews but, in the years following Israel's victory, the religious significance was emphasized. Like Jerusalem, the West Bank, known to religious Jews as Judea and Samaria, contained religious sites from ancient times. Complementing the Western Wall of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, the West Bank territories included the tombs of Abraham, Sarah and Rachel and other sites of religious and historical importance for Jews who aspired to reclaim and perhaps rebuild Jewish life in the promised land.

But the religious movements around Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria were rendered moot with a victory in war and the subsequent planned settlements in these areas. In the crucial time period after the 1967 war, the decision was made within the Israeli government to annex and expand Jerusalem, fortify it with settlements and expand further into the territories for political, economic and military reasons. Since religious fundamentalists have at no time dominated the Israeli government, the annexation of Jerusalem and the settlement of the West Bank should be seen as a calculated state expansion into areas where stakes could be claimed as the spoils of war and where no power could confront that expansion.

American foreign policy was also involved here, as it is today. Though official policies of the the U.S. government have never recognized the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem or the West Bank settlements as legal – nor are they recognized by international law – American foreign aid and security assistance has been essential to these policies.

Here again religiosity is hardly a dominant factor. Rather, the U.S. foreign policy considerations, sometimes spoken of in moral tones,

appear to dominate. Domestic pressure from American Jewish groups, Jewish elected officials, Jewish political activists and foreign policy advisers has been instrumental in the pursuit of these unofficial policies.

Jewish spokespeople in the U.S. have been mainstream Jews, decidedly moderate and liberal, and in the main, political Democrats. Those that are religious are, again, moral in tone and liberal in sensibility. It is important to note that the main public figures who have garnered support for Israel in the United States have framed Jewish and non-Jewish support for Israel in Holocaust sensibility and moral language. There are few Jews of major consequence in the public narrative of support for Israel in the U.S. who frame their support in anything resembling Orthodox, right-wing nationalist, or settler language.

Clearly the major spokesperson over the years for Holocaust/Israel consciousness in the United States is Elie Wiesel. Wiesel has been powerful both within the Jewish community and outside of it, having to his credit the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal, the Nobel Peace Prize, and a major hand in the development of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He is a friend of presidents as diverse as Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, appears often on national television as a commentator on moral and ethical issues, and is seen in prestigious national events like the State of the Union address. Wiesel is religious in a particularly Jewish and liberal ecumenical way that has a broad appeal to Jews who want to claim a post-Holocaust Jewish identity and to non-Jews who want to repent of the sin of anti-Semitism that European Christianity promulgated with such fervor over much of its history.<sup>4</sup>

In Wiesel's written works and public presentations there is no mention of biblical claims to the land of Judea and Samaria – or even the land that comprises the 1967 borders of Israel – nor is there discussion of settlements and settlers or religious shrines and attachments. Jerusalem is spoken about in an abstract, mystical way, as is the 1967 war, where for Wiesel the Israeli soldiers carried Jewish history and innocence into a battle that was forced upon them by the Arab world.

Shorn of the details of occupation and settlement, in Wiesel's narrative Israel becomes a homeland for persecuted European Jews and Holocaust survivors. Jews are innocent in suffering *and* empowerment. Israel is a moral crusade that all of humanity is called upon to affirm and support. In Wiesel's Israel, politics and the army are

almost invisible, as are the Palestinians. The U.S. supports Israel because, like Israelis, Americans are innocent and good. Even Christians, now reformed of their anti-Semitism, practice their essential innocence and goodness by holding up Israel as a response to the Holocaust.

In many ways, Wiesel's argument for Israel is one without maps or politics. In the U.S. this is true as well. In a public and national way, there has never been a sustained and rational discussion about Israel in America. This is, of course, most particularly and egregiously true within the Jewish community as well. The arguments about Israel that include Palestinians are between pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian supporters, or at least this is how the debate is defined. The reality of the expanded state of Israel, a state that now extends its reach between Tel Aviv and the Jordan River – with over three million Palestinians in between – is unknown to most Americans and Jews as well.

It is difficult to know how to address this impasse. In the pages that follow I try to uncover some hidden dimensions of the questions facing Jews, Judaism and Jewish history. In Chapter 1, I trace the role of memory in Jewish thought and religion and how that memory has highlighted *and* hidden aspects of Jewish life historically and in the present. Jewish historians of memory, such as Yosef Yerushalmi and David Roskies, are brought to the fore, as are theologians and commentators such as Emil Fackenheim, Cynthia Ozick and Irena Klepfisz.

In the main, these Jewish intellectuals embrace the Holocaust as defining contemporary Jewish life but point, sometimes with certainty and sometimes inadvertently, to a future beyond the Holocaust. Roskies' 'liturgy of destruction', for example, can be confined to the Jewish people, so that Jewish suffering is privileged and future Jewish suffering must be guarded against at all costs. But it can also open Jews to the world of suffering, including and especially the suffering of the Palestinian people, as part of Jewish history, thus calling for an end to Palestinian suffering as a key to the Jewish future.

Similarly, Emil Fackenheim's '*tikkun* of ordinary decency', which he defines as the small acts of generosity that a few non-Jews risked toward Jews in the Nazi era, represented then and represents today the possibility of an ontological and historical healing of the rupture of the Holocaust. But this can move in two different directions. For Fackenheim, the most obvious movement of this *tikkun* – healing or

mending in the present – is toward an unequivocal support of Jewish empowerment in Israel, but another latent movement is the further extension of ordinary decency toward Palestinians.

The oppression of the Palestinians represents a further rupture in the universe and in history that also needs mending. In this sense, Jewish outreach toward Palestinians in the twenty-first century may be equivalent to non-Jews reaching out to Jews in the Nazi era. This raises a further fundamental question as to whether Jewish empowerment at the expense of another people represents a healing for the Jewish people or whether Jews can only be healed of the trauma of the Holocaust when Palestinians are healed of their own trauma of displacement and humiliation.

Chapter 2 moves from memory and theology to the map of Israel/Palestine as it is today and how it will be, no doubt with minor adjustments, for the foreseeable future. Memory, identity and formation theology, even ideology, often seek to transcend the realities of the world. In that transcendence all is possible, even the positing of innocence where innocence has become culpability. The map of Israel/Palestine with Israeli control stretching from Tel Aviv to the Jordan River is rarely discussed in Jewish circles. Nor is the planned, systematic, government-sponsored, bureaucratically implemented settlement policy spoken of.

In the main, Jews discuss Israel as if a nation-state is not in place or as if Israel is unlike any other state in its desire for control and expansion. Yet one of the features of contemporary Jewish life is our involvement with nation-states at the highest levels, most obvious in Israel but also aggressively and successfully in the U.S. I suggest here that involvement in the upper echelons of the nation-state as an empowered and favoured community means a major intellectual, political and cultural reorientation of Jewish life.

On these levels, and in the religious arena as well, Jewish leadership enters into an ecumenical and political deal with the non-Jewish establishment in the West and within the international nation-state community through Israel. I call this a Constantinian deal, where Jewish hope, memory, intellect, wealth and religion are mobilized for empowerment, much as the early Christians were mobilized in the Constantinian synthesis of church and state in the fourth century.

Thus we are witnessing today the emergence of Constantinian Judaism in service to the state and power, and in this regard, Jews today are undergoing the most thorough assimilation in Jewish

history. While this assimilation seems now almost inevitable, the map of Israel/Palestine is a reminder of the cost of that assimilation, the loss of the Jewish ethical base and hence the loss, too, of the covenantal affirmation carried by Jews and Judaism thus far throughout history.

Here the conquest of Jerusalem becomes a litmus test and a warning to the cost of Jewish power *and* the possibility of choosing a different path. For if Jerusalem is seen as the 'broken middle' of Israel/Palestine – to be fully shared among Jews and Palestinians – and if citizenship rather than religion or ethnic identity is the path of a shared life and responsibility, then Jerusalem can indeed become a beacon of hope for Jews and Palestinians in the twenty-first century.

A shared Jerusalem and the movement toward citizenship in Israel/Palestine is the path away from a Constantinianism in politics and religion that threatens the very heart and soul of Jewish history. It is here that another map comes into consciousness, that we as Jews come after the Holocaust *and* Israel, and that the way forward is to recognize that our innocence in suffering does not translate into innocence in empowerment.

In Chapter 3, I explore the prophetic tradition within Judaism. This tradition has had many twists and turns over the millennia, yet remains the most distinctive Jewish contribution to the world. It is the prophetic that grounds critiques of power and innocence and even provides the foundations of the monotheistic faith traditions. At the same time, these traditions that announce the prophetic also attempt to constrain and seal the prophetic in ritual. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are in turn prophetic in their respective critiques of unjust power and assimilationists when legitimating power that dislocates and destroys.

As has often been the case, the prophetic voice in the contemporary world is in conflict with the traditions that claim the ancient prophets themselves. Hence, those who seek and embody the prophetic call in our time are often in exile. This is especially true for Jews who argue for justice in Israel/Palestine. Since the covenant is at the heart of the prophetic, and since both can never be contained within any system of thought or religiosity, especially systems that mask injustice and culpability with a sense of innocence and entitlement, both the prophetic and the covenant are constantly on the move, traveling among the oppressed and those actively seeking justice.

In the twenty-first century, a community across geographic, cultural and religious backgrounds is forming around the prophetic and pursues the covenant into a broader tradition of faith and struggle. Within this broader tradition a coalition of exiles and refugees comes into a new community of resistance and struggle. As this community evolves, so does the meaning of the prophetic and the covenant.

This evolving community and meaning challenge the memory of suffering, the liturgy of destruction, and the *tikkun* of ordinary decency to attend to the world as it is today, to take the same risks and embody the same possibilities for the suffering rather than shield the once-oppressed and now all-powerful. Can this evolving prophetic community address Jewish culpability the way the ancient prophets did? Will those within this tradition risk exile to speak the truth as the ancient prophets did? Can this tradition be successful in the face of state power?

Within Jewish life there has been a tradition of dissent regarding Zionism, including among Zionists themselves. Much of this tradition is forgotten or deliberately buried. Few Jews know that Judah Magnes, the first president of Hebrew University, Martin Buber, the great biblical scholar and theologian, and Hannah Arendt, the philosopher of the mind and the human condition, were all bi-nationalists, opposed to a Jewish state in Palestine. They argued instead for a cooperative federation of Jews and Arabs.

The responses to these questions are surprisingly relevant. They are, of course, controversial. And they will be answered in the next fifty years. Chapter 4 frames the question in this way: are the boundaries of the Jewish state as they are today, are the boundaries of Jewish life in its Constantinian phase, to be the boundaries of Jewish destiny? I ask if all of Jewish history has come to this, that a small, creative, struggling, often suffering community assimilates to power and the state to survive the vicissitudes of history. I ask also if the prophetic voice and the covenant are now to function only to cloak power and convince the culpable of their innocence.

In this context I try to trace the future of Judaism and the Jewish community in Israel/Palestine and the U.S. if the present course of assimilation remains uninterrupted. In the Epilogue I also suggest an alternative future that exists on the horizon for a minority of Jews who choose exile rather than complicity.

For that is our hope, always there to be chosen, another way of being Jewish and human in a world of empire. That those who gave

birth to the ethics of community should now deny that ethics to another people – and thus ultimately to relinquish that privileged claim – is part of the ironic nature of the human journey. What we do with this origin and this irony is defining of our own fidelity, as weak and insignificant as it often seems. In victory and in defeat it is what we bequeath to the next generation who will themselves continue to struggle with the prophetic and the covenant.

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