

Beyond the Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Solidarity with the Palestinian People

by Marc H. Ellis

Some time ago I received a phone call from a young Jewish progressive thinker inviting me to give a short reflection at a gathering commemorating the eighth anniversary of the massacres at the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in West Beirut, Lebanon. These massacres took place in September 1982, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and claimed at least 800 lives; the actual death toll may have been considerably higher.

As I recall, the invitation came in the middle of the conversation and, with my acceptance, we simply continued on. I accepted the invitation as I accept most invitations: taking note of the date and time, inquiring about the expected length of the talk and the likely composition of the audience.

After our phone conversation, I took a walk and within minutes I was shaken by the prospect of addressing the enormity of Sabra and Shatila. If Palestinians were present, I wondered how they would feel about a Jew addressing their dead, about this atrocity which in reality and symbolically helps define their experience of the Jewish people.

Would I, like many Jewish spokespersons, mention the suffering, then point out, as had been affirmed by the Kahan Commission appointed to investigate the massacres, Israel's "indirect responsibility," lament the rise of Menachem Begin and Ariel

ways being careful when pointing out current Israeli "rejectionism" that the "original sin," in his eyes, was Palestinian rejectionism?¹

And from a religious viewpoint, would Jews want or expect me to demonstrate the "anguish" of the Israeli

Jewish theologian David Hartman, or assent to the recent essay of the American Jewish theologian Arthur Waskow, who refers to the land as being twice blessed, to Jews and Palestinians, while at the same time arguing, even at this late date, in the midst of the brutal suppression of the Palestinian uprising, that we, the Jewish people, are a vanguard people?

And how could I articulate to the audience of Jews and Palestinians that the problem, in my mind, was less Begin, Sharon and Shamir, though they were indeed problematic, but

Jewish progressives like Hartman and Waskow, as well as others like Michael Walzer, a Jewish ethicist at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton, and Abba Eban, the Israeli diplomat. For these progressives are the ones who, before and after Sabra and Shatilla, who before and during the Palestinian uprising, define the parameters of dissent—the realm of thinkable thought—the borderline for which excommunication is in-



Dr. Marc Ellis in Lewiston, Maine, February 8, 1991
Credit: Lewiston Sun Journal

Sharon as aberrations within the Zionist enterprise, and then proceed to analyze the damage of such events to the Jewish soul? And what would Jews in the audience want or expect of me: to be critical of Israel then and now, but to hold to that tenuous line—as the contemporary Jewish thinker David Biale describes the litmus test of authentic Jewish progressives—between the two rights of Jews and Palestinians to the land, al-

Marc H. Ellis's most recent book is *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power*.

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About This Issue...

Marc Ellis is a Jewish theo-
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Last summer, at a Pres-
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In all his writings and lec-
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proposes that Christians and
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perhaps more than any
other, that has come to de-

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Readers wishing a fuller
exposition of Marc’s ideas will
find them in his two books,
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more recent book, which is
reviewed in this issue on page
12, **Beyond Innocence &
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the Holocaust and Israeli
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Also reviewed in this issue
is the new work by Father
Elias Chacour, **We Belong
to the Land**. This, along with
our full catalogue, is found
on pages 12-16.

John F. Mahoney
Executive Director

voked, and thus, in Noam Chomsky's analysis, become experts in legitimization?²

Of course, in another sense the unthinkable has already been both thought and done, from the beginning, and the massacres at Sabra and Shatila - surrounded, as these camps were, by the Israeli aerial bombardments and napalming common in Lebanon - were less an aberration than a continuity with the mass atrocities and expulsions of Palestinians in 1948, the Qibya massacre of 1953, the expulsions, occupation and annexation of 1967, and, of course, the terror, deportations and atrocities since December 1987. And all this has been combined with a methodical, systematic, bureaucratic and, from the Israeli side, completely legal process of expropriation and displacement. At this level the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, like Deir Yassin in 1948, the Ami Popper incident in May 1990 and the October 8, 1990 massacres at the Dome of the Rock, planned and unplanned, whether the Jewish underground, the Israeli regular forces, or individual actions, all take on an almost sinister logic: to make it clear that no Palestinians living in historic Palestine are safe and that any dream of return to Palestine will issue into the nightmare of massive dislocation and death.³

Jewish Progressives and the Palestinians

Many years ago in his book *The Rebel*, Albert Camus wrote that when "crime dons the apparel of innocence, it is innocence which is called upon to justify itself," and we must say that over the years it is Jewish progressives in America who have been called upon to justify, to defend, to, if necessary, lie about this continuity of criminality. And in many ways it is Jewish progressives in America who have justified and defended Jewish progressives in Israel who have been the architects

of these policies from the beginning - that is, David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, Shimon Peres as examples - that is the Labor party rather than Likud. The best of all possible worlds, of course, is the progressive Jewish Israeli who can speak as a bridge for the American Jewish progressive community: people like Abba Eban and the Israeli "peace camp."

The overall message which emanates from the progressive spokespersons, at least of late, is clear: all is not well; keep the faith. Surely this is the message of Abba Eban in his introduction to the English language publication of the Kahan Commission report on the Sabra and Shatila massacres. For Eban, an aberration occurred which Jewish conscience could not bury. Admitting "indirect" responsibility, the Commission itself and the demonstrations which forced the inquiry, all in Eban's eyes are a testimony to the strength and vibrancy of Israeli democracy. To be sure, according to Eban, other peoples, especially the Palestinians, lack such conscience and fortitude. However, the overall Zionist enterprise is necessary and proper: the strength of Israeli democracy allows for mid-course corrections.⁴

As eloquent and persuasive as Eban's analysis is for some Jews, the more powerful complement is furnished by the legitimization offered by those theologians who provide the framework of Holocaust theology to justify the almost unqualified and unequivocal support of Israel. One

within empowerment might accomplish again what the enemies of the Jews have already accomplished once: holocaust. For Greenberg, the necessity of a new Jewish ethic involves the articulation and acceptance of the "normalization" of the Jewish condition and the correction of aberrations, among them aberrations like the massacres at Sabra and Shatila. On the Lebanese war, initiated by Israel, which claimed 10-20,000 Palestinian and Lebanese lives, Greenberg concludes in a characteristic way: "The war was wrong but well within the parameters of error and breakdown which characterize normal, healthy, moral democracies."⁵

This analysis by Greenberg was written in March 1988 in an essay titled, "The Ethics of Jewish Power." Thus his reflection on Lebanon takes place within the context of the Palestinian uprising, to which he applies a similar standard: correct the abuse; keep the faith. And like Eban in his analysis of Sabra and Shatila, Greenberg mentions the massacres, the dead and the dying Palestinians of Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza, within the context of Jewish morality, Jewish conscience, Jewish democracy and Jewish strength. The drama is Jewish; the Palestinians are peripheral, and since the drama is essentially religious, having to do with the innocence and redemption of the Jewish people, the Palestinians are the "others" who block this eschatological vision. As for centuries the central "other" who blocked the

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such orthodox Holocaust theologian is Rabbi Irving Greenberg, director of the New York City Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, who sees the Jewish prophetic critique as growing out of Jewish powerlessness and that a continuation of that critique with the assumption of power is both naive and dangerous. The warning is clear: the prophetic

Christian drama in the West, we Jews should be aware of the possible consequences which may be and perhaps already are far beyond the "corrective" scenario of Eban and Greenberg.⁶

But what if one finds that the understanding of the "normalization" of the Jewish people is abnormal and unacceptable? What if one comes to

believe that the aberration is in fact longstanding and continuing and that any correction will be within the framework of continuity rather than a radical changing of direction? What if the essence of the Israeli state is expansion rather than democracy, and that the Jewish character of the state makes expendable, in a terrifying sense, makes logical the end of indigenous Palestinian culture and community in historic Palestine? What if one believes that what we are witnessing today is the culmination of a sixty-year process in which Palestinian culture and peoplehood are destroyed in historic Palestine? And what if one believes that the end of Palestine signals the end of the Jewish tradition as we have known and inherited it?

If all this is true then we can draw the following conclusions: That the survival of the Palestinian people, while dependent on many factors, is also partially dependent on progressive Jews moving beyond the acceptable levels of Jewish dissent; that the progressive Jewish dissenting community must realize that in fact Eban, Walzer, Hartman, Biale, Waskow, Greenberg, et. al. — in short the old boys network of Jewish progressives, resurrected and infused with energy by Michael Lerner's new journal *Tikkun* — is not with regard to the Palestinian people progressive at all. Operating from a political and ethical high ground, involved almost exclusively in a now more defensive but still rigorous vanguard mentality, the Jewish progressive consensus position is a form of oppression vis-a-vis the Palestinian people.

Finally, it is important to understand that the Jewish progressive tradition as we know it can live with the expansion and expulsions of 1948 and 1967, as Martin Buber and Abba Eban did, with the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, as Elie Wiesel did, with the policy of might and beatings, as David Hartman and Irving Greenberg did, and, I would venture to add, with the final wave of mass expulsions of Palestinians which appear on the not-too-distant horizon.

Simply put: corrections, anguish over Israeli policies, or arguments for the Jewish soul, are not enough.⁷

I am quite well aware that at this point any truly progressive position may fail in its test with Jewish state power in Israel, and of course this has been part of the anguish quotient in Jewish politics and theology — feeling forced to defend policies that many can hardly support and no one outside of the state apparatus

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can control. Thus breaking completely with these policies and with the role of legitimization cannot guarantee success. That is, we are dealing with state power, Jewish in this case, which is bent on eliminating the Palestinian presence in historic Palestine.

At this juncture there seems only two possibilities to control Jewish state power in Israel: call for and actively pursue the end of U.S. aid to Israel; force the end of the Israeli occupation through military intervention. Though these two positions often occasion a hysterical reaction, in reality they simply represent the flip side of Greenberg's understanding of normalization: an occupying power, once given the possibility of voluntary withdrawal, must then face political, diplomatic, economic and military sanctions. In this light the linkage made of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza becomes less far-fetched than often portrayed in the Western media. Thus a truly progressive Jewish position must take into account these realities, which is to say that we are unable to, indeed we refuse to live with the inevitability of the end that the Israeli state proposes.

With these propositions suggested, I would advance five statements, endless in their complexity, which may give form to a more honest progressive Jewish position:

* What Jews have done to the Pal-

estianians since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 is wrong.

* In the process of conquering and displacing the Palestinian people, Jews have done what has been done to us over two millennia.

* In this process Jews have become almost everything we loathe about our oppressors.

* It is only in confronting state power in Israel that Jews can move beyond being victim or oppressor.

* The movement beyond victimization and oppression can only come through a solidarity with those whom we as Jews have displaced: the Palestinian people.

Clearly the inability of Jewish progressives to make these statements continues today at the close of the Gulf war. The example of Yossi Sarid and other Peace Now activists in their abandonment of the Palestinians for "supporting Iraq" shows the shallowness of their position with regards to justice for the Palestinian people.

Solidarity with the Palestinian People

What does this solidarity with the Palestinian people mean today? What are the foundational visions which may shape this concept of solidarity into flesh and blood reality?

The first step, of course, is to abandon the two-rights understanding, as if the question of Jews and Palestinians is a symmetrical one. Whatever one wants to argue from the Jewish side vis-a-vis Jewish history—our difficult history in Europe which gave rise to Zionism and the culmination of that history in the Holocaust which provided the final impetus for the birth of the Jewish state—the effect for the Palestinians has been brutal, even catastrophic.

A. B. Yehoshua, the Jewish Israeli novelist, writes that the "concept of

historic right has no objective moral validity when applied to the return of the Jewish people to its land." Rather, as a committed Zionist, Yehoshua argues that the Jewish people has a "full moral right to seize part of Eretz Israel, or any other land, even by force," on the basis of a right he calls the survival right of the endangered. His underlying proposition is as follows: "A nation without a homeland has the right to take, even by force, part of the homeland of another nation, and to establish its sovereignty there." Thus Yehoshua, unlike most Jewish progressives, admits of what might be termed a necessary theft, as it were a "moral invasion." But to hold the Palestinians responsible for resisting that theft or to expect them to accept it is in Yehoshua's eyes ridiculous, as is the extension of that theft to the rest of historic Palestine, that is the possible annexation of the occupied territories. For Yehoshua, the basis for the Jewish right is the seizure of a part, and thus if Jews intend to extricate themselves from the "situation of a people without a homeland by turning another people into a nation without a homeland, our right to survival will turn to dust in our hands."⁸

Whatever one thinks of Yehoshua's foundational argument that the survival of the Jewish people is linked to a territorial sovereignty - a position that should be probed in a deep way by Jewish thinkers - his two-rights position moves well beyond the typical expression of Jewish innocence and Palestinian demonism. Though his book bears the English title *Between Right and Right*, his argument speaks of Jewish necessity, the dispersal of Palestinians, and the right of Palestinians to resist. Thus, the title might be better rendered as *Between Jewish Necessity and Palestinian Rights to a Homeland*. Accordingly, it could be that the formation of Israel was necessary in its historical moment and at the same time wrong vis-a-vis the Palestinian people. The original sin, then, was European anti-semitism, not Palestinian resistance to a Jewish

state. But even here, if one accepts Yehoshua's analysis of historical necessity in seizing only a part of the land, the framework he maintains is strictly separatist. That is, the necessity of survival, the formation of a Jewish state, is extended beyond the historical moment into a relentless future: to survive physically and culturally Jews must be separate in their own land for the remainder of world history. The moral invasion is to flee the fire and to build a new home among others who have fled the same fire. Those who fled the Jewish fire must rebuild their own homes somewhere else.⁹

Here the "two state" position, while seemingly progressive, argued from a survivalist or innocent perspective, needs to be questioned within the framework of solidarity. The entire burden of proof is placed on the Palestinians. For example, the two-state position as argued by most Jews, including Yehoshua, and others like Yossi Sarid, places primary responsibility on the Palestinians to, among other things, demonstrate their ability to live peacefully with Israel, to renounce their fundamental claims of sovereignty over all of Palestine, to guarantee a demilitarized state with Israeli security positions within Palestine and the right of Israeli invasion if militarization occurs. At the same time, it also limits forever the size of Palestine to one-fifth its original land mass in the least fertile part of Palestine. Among other things it assumes, at a foundational level, that Israelis should be afraid of Palestinians but Palestinians have nothing to fear from Israelis, a position that many Palestinians in their diaspora no doubt find surprising if not untenable.¹⁰

Though a two-state solution may be the only practical possibility at the moment, it falls far short of the solidarity requisite to the crisis which confronts both sides. Most Jewish progressives, for instance, see the two-state solution as a way of ridding themselves of the Palestinian "problem" demographically and morally. Give them their state and Jews are free of a possible Palestinian

majority, hence the preservation of the Jewish state; Jews are also morally cleansed of having expelled, beaten, tortured and murdered Palestinians, thereby protecting the purity of the Jewish soul. The position is clear as Amos Oz, the Jewish Israeli novelist, describes it: granting a divorce between Jews and Palestinians. The image is equally clear: separate Jewish and Palestinian states, with a wall so high that Jews will never have to see another Palestinian. Palestinians will be banished from Jewish history.¹¹

The desire to preserve, or rather reassert Jewish innocence by banishing the victims of Jewish oppression is understandable and inadequate. It allows Jews to retreat from this confrontation with Palestinians and within themselves as if the bloodshed had not occurred. By allowing Jews to see themselves in their pre-state identity, they ignore the brutality Jews are capable of, thus ignoring Jewish post-state reality. That Jewish history in Palestine is covered with blood through our contemporary oppression of Palestinians is a lesson absolutely necessary for Jews as a people. We cannot come to grips with our recent history unless we see the Palestinians now as intimate to our self-identity and capabilities as a people. That is, the victims of Jewish power are as intimate to us as we are to those who oppressed us. Confronting the Jewish abuse of power is impossible without the physical preservation of Palestine in our midst, and the prospect of Jewish healing both in its trauma of European mass murder and in its trauma of beating and expelling another people cannot be worked out alone.

Progressive proponents of the two-state solution seek to banish the bad Jewish conscience in a way that delays the reckoning with the history Jews have created. Thus a genuine Jewish progressive position is dependent on moving beyond the state of Israel and the state of Palestine into a genuine vision of confederation which allows both autonomy and integration of Jews and Pales-

tinians. Of course this also leaves open the possibility of a Palestinian return to parts of Palestine that would be closed off in a two-state scenario. If genuine solidarity is to be gleaned, then the Palestinians have a right to be healed of their

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own trauma of displacement, thus allowing a new perspective on their own catastrophe. Only a Palestinian right to return can authenticate what the Palestinian educator, Muhammed Hallaj, has written of as the interlocking destiny of Jew and Palestinian. In short the argument for a reality of Jewish and Palestinian life together in historic Palestine moves beyond the typical Jewish progressive concern for Jewish purity and innocence by envisioning a future which recovers the deepest ethical impulses of the Jewish people in confrontation with the reality of Jewish history.¹²

But arguing from the Jewish perspective does not in the least diminish the Palestinian recovery by placing it solely within the Jewish framework. The Palestinian future is for Palestinians authentic and self-generating. Their desire or refusal to live with Jews is of course their decision to make within the context of Palestinian history. Jewish life as interlocking with Palestinian life is an absolute necessity from the Jewish perspective but is, in any view, entirely optional from the Palestinian perspective of living on the other side of Jewish power.

Solidarity with the Palestinian people moves beyond romanticization and demonization. Solidarity with the Jewish people in Europe was an ethical and practical necessity not because all Jews were beautiful but because Jews as a people were innocent. As documented by many Jewish historians, the Jewish ghettos had heroes, ordinary citizens, criminals and collaborators. The behavior of Jews toward other Jews ran the gamut of great charity to unbridled

brutality and, of course, everything in between. And the Palestinians are no doubt similar in regard to their complexity and, in this situation, their innocence.

Hence Jewish progressives often want it both ways: a retroactive de-

mand of rescue of all Jews during the Holocaust, coupled with no discussion of Jewish internal realities outside of the framework of innocence. Similarly, they reject any connection between Jewish rescue and Jewish behavior just a decade after the Holocaust, or even today, but find it surprisingly easy to take to task Palestinians with regard to the policies of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Palestinian reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, in general anything that seems to compromise Palestinian innocence from a Jewish perspective. They also constantly link the Palestinian struggle for liberation with the policies of a

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future Palestinian state, as if the unknown future should determine the level of support for the current struggle. Thus as Jews we rightly shift the burden of proof to those who oppressed us, but in a strange twist we now continually shift the burden of proof to those whom we are oppressing.¹³

To accept this analysis is to radically change the Jewish perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from two rights to wrong and right; from aberration to continuity; from the need for "corrections" to a radical critical evaluation. As important, and as difficult, at least for Jewish progressives, is the radical reevaluation of Jewish self-understanding these statements imply. Israel is not innocent, and neither are we: our claims on suffering are now forfeited. Our claim to chosenness, even

in a secularized form, has become irritating rather than compelling. Israel is not redemptive, and neither is Jewish empowerment. Instead Israel, and for that matter the politicized use of the Holocaust, is a burden to the Palestinian people and to the Jewish people as well. The question of Israel and the remembrance of the Holocaust so central to Jewish identity have become something other than expected and so have we. Is it possible to see ourselves as a people organized to destroy another people without radically reevaluating who we have become as a people? And if we have betrayed our suffering and our empowerment is built on the blood of others, where are we to turn in order to reconstruct a way of being Jewish in which we can recognize our own faces and hearts and realize the deepest impulses of the Jewish people?

This is the task before us, one that will need the skills of politics, ethics and theology to successfully realize. In his 1968 analysis of the imperatives of the Holocaust Emil

Fackenheim, one of the more noted Jewish Holocaust Theologians, emphasized the need for sheer survival of the Jewish people in order to face the questions of Jewish history and a possible Jewish future. Today, just two decades later, in a way that Fackenheim could not then and does not today understand, in a momentous inversion, the survival of the Palestinian people provides the possibility of a Jewish future.

This is no doubt what the German Catholic theologian Johann Baptist Metz had in mind when he envisioned the future of Christians and Jews after the Holocaust in these words: "We Christians can never 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." In light of Sabra and Shatila and the Palestinian uprising, these words assume a new meaning relating to the common journey of Jew and Palestinian. For Jews the challenge might be stated thusly: "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, the Palestinian people."¹⁴

Christian Theology and the Palestinian Uprising

Though some Jews are willing to move beyond the Jewish progressive consensus, they are few in number and relatively unorganized, a small minority without public voice. And those who might provide solidarity and a platform for Jewish dissent, that is progressive Christians, are too often aligned with the progressive Jewish consensus. This union of progressive Jews and Christians was formed after the Holocaust and especially after the Second Vatican Council, which gave birth to the contemporary ecumenical dialogue.

As pursued over the last decades, the ecumenical dialogue has concerned itself with a variety of issues, including, among others, covenant, salvation, and civil rights, but the main aspects of the dialogue remain today what they were in the beginning: anti-semitism and Israel. The foundation of the dialogue rests on Christian repentance for anti-Jewishness and acceptance of Israel as central to Jewish identity. Those involved in the dialogue know that it has essentially turned into what one might call the ecumenical deal: eternal repentance for Christian anti-Jewishness unencumbered by any substantive criticism of Israel. Substantive criticism of Israel means, at least from the Jewish side, the reemergence of Christian anti-Jewishness.

In this Ecumenical deal Zionism and Judaism are essentially linked,

and the main energy of ecumenical gatherings is spent on diverting the question that hovers over all discussions of Jews and Christians: the oppression of the Palestinian people by Jewish Israelis with the support, by commission or omission, of Jewish and Christian partners in the ecumenical dialogue. The ecumenical dialogue, or if you will, the ecumenical deal, continues as a way to manage Christian dissent on the issue of Israel and Palestine by brandishing the potent club of anti-Jewishness.¹⁵

The paradox is that just as Jewish progressives and career ecumenical dialoguers like former director of the Synagogue Council of America, Rabbi Marc Tannebaum, provide the cover for Israeli policy, Christian progressives, who joined the dialogue out of repentance, also enter into complicity against indigenous Palestinian culture and presence in historic Palestine. Jewish progressives provide the good face of Jews and Israel which Christians accept and, in a strange twist, desperately need. Adjustments are made, of course, when specific incidents are too horrible to be accepted and then Jewish and Christian progressives share a particular and short-lived anguish which paradoxically strengthens the bond of these dialoguers as they attempt to navigate the issue of Jews and Israel through a difficult period. Any Christian who moves beyond anguish into a critical confrontation with Israeli policy demanding, for example, the end of the occupation, is jettisoned from the rarefied atmosphere of the dialogue or simply finds no Jews to speak

atically rarely know how to speak of the present reality. They are literally without a framework, theological or otherwise, to analyze, let alone articulate the end of Jewish innocence. What does the ecumenical dialogue look like if Christians no longer oppress Jews and if Jews actually oppress Palestinians? Where does the ecumenical discussion move if Jews are not powerless but rather are powerful and too often use that power to subjugate another people?

Christian theologians have offered little guidance in this area. For example, Roy Eckardt, of Lehigh University and Paul van Buren, of Temple University, have written poignantly about Jewish suffering in European history and beautifully about the Christian need to recover Jewish roots and face the Jewish people as a living reality. Yet in so doing they have, despite protests to the contrary, romanticized Jews and the Jewish tradition and placed critique of Israel at a superficial level of policy analysis, which mitigates against a radical probing of the central dynamic of Jewish Israeli existence: the diminution or end of a Palestinian presence in historic Palestine. In short, Eckardt and van Buren replicate the Jewish progressive consensus of Eban, Walzer and Hartman: the drama of Holocaust and Israel is Jewish, having to do with Jewish suffering and empowerment. For Eckardt and van Buren, the Palestinians are peripheral, almost absent. For better or worse, Palestinians must accept this Jewish drama because of historic Christian anti-Jew-

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with. Any Jew who has engaged in substantive public criticism of Israel is not allowed in the dialogue at all. Thus well meaning Christians are, like Jewish progressives, in complicity with ethnocide.¹⁶

Those Christians who realize, even dimly, that the relationship of Jews and Christians has changed dra-

ishness. In general, Christian theologians provide little if any help in articulating what everybody, especially Palestinians, know: that Jews without power can be demonized and romanticized by Christians but it remains almost impossible for Christians to accept that Jews, having taken power, are doing exactly

to Palestinians what was done to them by Christians.¹⁷

Robert McAfee Brown, Professor Emeritus at Pacific School of Religion in California, is another Christian theologian whose work has been affected both by the Holocaust and more recently by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His earlier involvement with the Holocaust is most evident in his study *Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity*, in which Brown attempts to immerse himself in the Holocaust world of death and destruction. Clearly Brown, a Presbyterian, sees the Holocaust as a challenge to Jews and Christians, indeed the entire world. For Brown, the Holocaust confronts the world and especially Christians with moral dilemmas posed in the form of questions: How could a decent people with the highest form of Western culture engage in the murder of six million Jews? How could the world remain silent as the Jews were slaughtered? How can the world remain indifferent today, when similar horrors loom on the horizon? How can we believe in human goodness or God after the Holocaust and in the face of the difficult challenges confronting us today? For Brown, listening to voices from the Holocaust provides insight into these questions; but more, it forces a confrontation with some of the most difficult questions of twentieth-century life. Though it is impossible for Brown and others who were not in the death camps to enter into the world of the Holocaust, it is possible to allow the Holocaust to enter their world. This is a shattering experience, but Brown believes it is only through taking the risk of listening to the stories of the Holocaust that the ability to celebrate life may be reclaimed.¹⁸

With Brown's respect for Jewish suffering in mind, and his continuous gestures of solidarity with the Jewish people and with Israel over the years, it is interesting to see his latest commentary on the uprising, titled "Christians in the West Must Confront the Middle East." As a person known for his prophetic writings

about many areas of the world, Brown's reluctance to criticize Israel has been obvious both to those who await his words and to himself. In the first place Brown has been reluctant to speak because of Jewish suffering and Christian complicity in that suffering, the understanding of which has "cast a heavy shadow over my view of the world, my understanding of God, any estimate of human nature and my theology of the church." In a world devoid of affirmations of Jews and Judaism, Israel has been a solace of affirmation for Jews and therefore worthy of support. For Brown, the limitation of this approach is that it fails to take with equal seriousness the rights of Palestinians, their displacement from the land, and the oppressive conditions under which they have been forced to live ever since.

The second reason for Brown's reluctance to speak is that the Holocaust was only the latest of almost two thousand years of Christian anti-Jewishness; a challenge to the existence of the state of Israel almost certainly will be interpreted as a continuation of that history, thus earning the label anti-Semitic. For Brown, the shortcomings of this approach lie in the failure of all involved to distinguish clearly enough between the religious faith, Judaism, and the modern political entity, Israel.

A final reason for silence is a Christian desire not to aid in any way "enemies of Israel who are anti-Semitic, terrorist, chauvinistic, unreasoning, or all of the above." Brown sees that the shortcoming here is the failure to distinguish between fanatical criticism and creative criticism; a terrain for public discourse must have options beyond supporting either Palestinian displacement or Israeli annihilation. In sum, Brown finds himself caught between two concerns, both legitimate and difficult to resolve: the commitment to Israel because of past Christian anti-Jewishness, and the commitment to the liberation of all oppressed people arising from Christian faith, a commitment that must include Jews in the past and Palestinians in the present.¹⁹

What allows Brown to break his silence is that Jews, for the first time and in great numbers, have broken their silence. And though criticism by non-Jews may be difficult to accept, providing a "kind of moral blank check" to Israel is helpful neither to Palestinians nor to Israelis; speaking the truth should be seen as an act of loyalty rather than disloyalty. Still, Brown warns against demagogic criticism like comparing Israelis to Nazis, as such a comparison denies the reality of the situation.

The problem for Brown is similar to what other Christian theologians refer to, that is, the double standard of Israel as seeming special and thus being criticized for behaving like other nations. Instead of a double standard Brown suggests a dialectical tension between Israel as special and Israel as normal, thus though its fears of annihilation are understandable in relation to its memory, in its operation as a state in warfare or dealing with refugees, for example, it is to be judged like any other nation. With this in mind Brown makes a plea to Israel: "You, more than all the other peoples of the earth, know what it is like to be refugees, sojourners, displaced persons, people whose lands have been overrun time and again by invaders. Your psalms and liturgies invoke that sense of homelessness as something to be overcome. The Torah calls on you to welcome the sojourner, to feed the hungry, to care for the sick and dying. Could you not exercise that kind of concern for the Palestinians 'within your gates' today?"²⁰

Brown concludes his essay with a discussion of a possible liberation theology for the Middle East, the elements of which include theological reflection growing out of the immediate situation; a true liberation achieved for all, rather than for some at the expense of others; a preferential option for the poor that leads to the empowerment of the weak, the Palestinians, as well as the now strong Israelis; recognition of the inherent risk in the liberation struggle, that the once-oppressed Jews will continue to oppress and that the oppressed Palestinians, once liberated,

may oppress the once more powerful Israelis. The more specific list of ingredients to be part of the solution from Brown's perspective include: a homeland for both Jews and Palestinians; safeguarding the rights of all minorities; respect for one another's borders; bilateral deescalation of the military forces; a willingness to have all parties judged by the same moral and political standards; an acknowledgment that everyone will have to settle for less than initially hoped for.²¹

Another theologian involved in a reappraisal of the Christian stance is Rosemary Radford Ruether, a Catholic theologian at Garrett Evangelical Seminary in Illinois. Since the publication of her book *Faith and Fratricide* in 1974, Ruether has become well known and respected for her critique of Christian triumphalism as a way of solidarity with the Jewish people. To her, the anti-Judaic bias that has accompanied the history of Christianity lives on in the present, thus continuing to nourish the roots of anti-Jewishness. A vital key for understanding aspects of Western history is therefore lost, and Christian theologians continue to write and to preach theologies that are implicitly, if not explicitly, anti-

The chief impediment to peace... is not today the Palestinian people but an expansionist and violent state of Israel.

Jewish. This selective ignorance is then passed on in the churches in a way that continues to reinforce the stereotype of the carnal, legalistic, and obsolete Jew. "This very suppression of Jewish history and experience from Christian consciousness is tacitly genocidal," Ruether writes. "What it says, in effect, is that the Jews have no further right to exist after Jesus. We repress the memory of their continued existence and our dealings with them so that it appears that 'after Christ' Jews disappear, and only Christians remain as the heirs of Jewish history and the people with a future."²²

At the same time Christians can-

not let past history silence them with regard to present abuses, nor can they assert from a Christian viewpoint the obsolete theological right of Israel to exist as a political state. Here Ruether takes on the difficult task for the Christian of speaking truth to Jewish power without being or being considered anti-Jewish. For Ruether, the critical analysis of Jewish suffering in European history must now be complemented by a critical analysis of how one response to that suffering, Zionism, has in the past and present affected the Palestinian people. Second is how Jewish and Christian theology has helped to legitimate Zionism in the past and the present, as well as the need to develop Jewish and Christian theologies that oppose the injustices inherent in Zionist ideology and practice. At the same time, Ruether finds it difficult or impossible for Christians to analyze the historical or theological patterns unless and until they come into contact and solidarity with the Palestinian people. Thus comes the crucial question that Brown broached earlier: whether Christians can be in solidarity with both Jews and Palestinians.²³

The answer for Ruether, as for Brown, is yes, but only when the

myths of Israelis as innocent and Palestinians as terrorists are exposed. By analyzing Zionist and Palestinian history, Ruether concludes that the chief impediment to peace has not been historically and is not today the Palestinian people but an expansionist and violent state of Israel. This impediment to peace lies in the concept of Israel as an exclusive Jewish state and also in Israel's position as an occupying power. Underlying both these realities is the refusal to recognize, alongside Jewish nationalism, a parallel Palestinian nationalism and right to self-determination. Though Ruether believes that a Jewish homeland should be

understood as a powerful part of contemporary Jewish identity, this understanding does not on the face of it give Jews a political right to found a state, much less to displace the Palestinian people in the process. Thus for Ruether three myths need to be overcome: that Jews have an a priori right to the whole of Palestine, that the Arab Palestinians do not have a parallel claim on the land as a national community, and that Israel must be oriented toward European people and culture and not be part of the Middle East. It is these three Zionist myths that have walled "Israel into a segregated, hostile, and violent relationship to the rest of the communities of people that live around it."²⁴

Although Ruether acknowledges that Jews have a fear of annihilation that comes from the Holocaust, it is unfair, she says, to transfer this fear to the Arabs. Palestinians cannot be expected to address this almost pathological fear that Jews have of them, "since it makes little sense to their own experience as refugees and as an oppressed community with no state, little land, no army worth mentioning and so little political clout that only by suffering endless assaults does it keep itself before the attention of the world at all." For Ruether, the struggle to demythologize the innocence of Israel is less an academic question than a struggle for the survival of the Palestinian people. In her most recent essay, "The Occupation Must End," Ruether details the brutal response of Israel to the Palestinian uprising in terms of injuries and deaths, now approaching eighty thousand, and the assault on Palestinian culture and education as a way of punishing and humiliating a people.²⁵

As might be expected, Ruether finds it difficult to communicate these facts to Christians in the West, because the flip side of anti-Jewishness has become philo-Semitism. This is a tendency to idealize Jews to the point of elevating them to a position of superior wisdom and morality, a tendency particularly true of liberal Christians who harbor an

intense guilt for Jewish sufferings, past and present. "When faced with the possibility that an organized group of Jews have done some pretty bad things to another group of people, any sensitive, anti-anti-Semites are thrown into agonized emotional conflict. We fear that we might be slipping back into negative stereotypes of Jews and quickly censor the thought that 'maybe those Jews are bad people after all.' This suggests to me that we Christians, with a history of negative stereotypes of Jews, have a hard time dealing with Jews as complex beings like ourselves."

Christian thinking about Jews therefore swings between two unrealistic polarities—Jews as superior to Christians, paragons of wisdom and moral insight, and Jews as inferior to Christians, untrustworthy and lacking in true capacity for moral and spiritual life. As Ruether envisions it, the task is to see Jews as different, with their own particular history and culture, and similar, with the same human attributes and propensities as others. Christians are just going to have to face the complexity of human nature in Jews as they learn to face it in themselves: the reality of the Jews in Israel has been of a dominant conquering power displacing another people and seeking to make them disappear.²⁶

The challenge for Christians is to see Jews as they are, but the conflict in Israel and Palestine also challenges the Jewish people to move beyond a particularity that emphasizes uniqueness in order to justify exclusivity, which in turn seeks to confer a special holiness and thus rights to the land that supersede the claims of others. Ruether suggests instead that Jews choose the universalist tradition in Judaism, which affirms Jewish particularity in solidarity with the particularity of other peoples. This ethic of mutual solidarity does not mean an anonymous universalism that contains (as it did in the past) a hidden agenda of ending Jewish distinctiveness, an agenda Jews rightly resist. "Rather, one must locate it in the concrete relations between different people who are actually called, either by

choice or by historical circumstances, to live side by side with each other. The quest of Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs for a just and peaceful coexistence is an instance of the difficulty and challenge of that ethical commandment."

Ultimately, to choose a different path, more than innocence and exclusivism needs to be given up. The understanding of Israel as redemptive is also thrown into question, for religious messianism in Holocaust theology and fundamentalist groups, rather than a healing and unifying force, has become a force of violence within the Jewish community as well as outward toward Palestinians. As Ruether comments:

The sabra, redeemed from Diaspora weakness, with a gun in one hand and a plow in the other, has become a military-political-industrial ruling elite. Many Jews no longer work the land with their own hands or do any kind of manual labor. For many, such labor is now seen as "Arab work," unbefitting a Jew. Some Israelis have become an urban managerial elite ruling over lower classes and races who do the manual labor. The dream of redemption through labor has evaporated in the reality of a colonialist, capitalist organization of the economy. The class and race hierarchy of labor, relegation of Palestinians to third-class citizens or stateless subjects of military rule, also destroys the messianic myth of Israel as model social democracy, a "light to the nations," in terms of democratic and socialist ideals.²⁷

Toward a Jewish-Christian-Palestinian Solidarity

What Brown and especially Ruether point to from the Christian viewpoint is exactly what is critical from the Jewish side as well: move beyond the abstraction of Jewish innocence and Israel as redemptive toward a concrete accounting of an occupation

which is oppressing another people. The important point here is that Christians are willing to move beyond their own innocence and redemption as well. In fact, the ability to move forward on the question of Israel and Palestine is directly linked to admitting that the Jewish and Christian thought of redemption when played out in the world is a catastrophe for the people who have to suffer it. In short, redemption - the Christian vision that every knee should bow before Christ or the Jewish version of the Greater Land of Israel - is covered with blood.

But as should now be apparent, the pursuit of redemption is not only a burden to be borne, say, by Jews within Christendom and Palestinians within the Greater Israel—that is a burden to the obvious victims. It also creates victims within the oppressing community. By oppressing others religion becomes a servant of the state and is used to legitimate state power, as is seen most explicitly in the Christian Constantinian synthesis, which originated in the fourth century when Constantine became the first Roman emperor to make Christianity a state religion. It still is in evidence today. From the Christian side, the ecumenical dialogue begins with the knowledge that this synthesis has been a disaster for Christianity itself. Paradoxically, at the same time as Christianity attempts to shed this albatross, it is Judaism which embarks on a Constantinianism of its own. Thus the freeing of Christianity and Christian theology from its dependence on state power, sadly is joined by a developing Constantinian Judaism. Of course, within Constantinian religiosity priests and rabbis continue to be produced; the churches and synagogues become even more elaborate. However, the bottom falls out, the ethical witness diminishes, and the discussions contain an emptiness about which everyone knows and agrees to remain silent.

As Brown and Ruether articulate it, the renewal of Christianity comes through identifying its victims, external and internal, and the Jewish

victims of Christianity play a tremendous role in this renewal. This is one part of the ecumenical dialogue. But today the renewal of Judaism and the Jewish people can only come through attention to its victims, the Palestinian people. Thus the ecumenical dialogue and the concomitant ecumenical deal come to an end because of the changing nature and objective circumstances of Jews and Christians. Yet with the end of the ecumenical dialogue, Jews and Christians are poised on a new and exciting possibility, that of a Jewish-Christian solidarity based on mutual repentance for sins and a mutual recognition that the redemption of each is at a bloody cost to the "other."

Here the Palestinians are central because they inform Christians that Jews are no longer simply innocent victims, and that Christians participate in a new crime by virtue of their silence. Palestinians are central as well because they embody in their dispersal and destruction the end of the Jewish tradition as we have inherited it. Thus Palestinians call Christians and Jews to an accounting which may lead to a greater maturity of each faith group and a new self-definition, hence a series of new possibilities, including the chance of Christian and Jewish healing.

Perhaps the exploration of what it means to be Jewish beyond Constantine Judaism rests with a new form of solidarity with Christians and Palestinians that poses the fundamental religious choice before us as a people. Is it possible after the Holocaust to embrace our former enemies, Christians, and our present "enemies," the Palestinian people? Is it possible after experiencing empire, the Holocaust, and forging empire in the greater land of Israel to once again pursue community, the sharing of land and destiny? Can we be healed of our own trauma if we do not recognize the trauma we are causing to another people? Can we feel safe in a world of domination, can we even ask the question of God after the Holocaust without this pursuit of community? We can hardly ask these questions alone. Is

it possible, though, to ask these questions anew with Christians and Palestinians?

So today, after Auschwitz and the Palestinian uprising, the path becomes clear. The future of Christianity in the west is somehow tied to the encounter with the Jewish people in the present and the future of the Jewish people is tied to the preservation and flourishing of Palestine within the Jewish world. In light of this, it is incumbent upon Jewish and Christian progressives to move toward a Jewish-Christian-Palestinian solidarity which recognizes both the tragedy of the present and the hope of the future.

I close as I began, with a story. Several years ago I lectured at a conference celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Eugene Rosenstock-Hussey, a German Jew who had converted to Christianity and who through dialogue challenged Franz Rosenzweig, another German Jew, to retain his Jewishness. Since both figures were German, a fairly large percentage of the conference attendees were German. After my talk, I was startled when a German woman, unused to public expressions of grief, took my hand and began to cry. In broken English, her words interrupted by sobs, she repeated over and over again her sorrow for what had happened to Jews and her inability to undo what had been done. As I held her hand, shaken myself, with little to do but to stand with her, another German came up to us and said, "You do not understand what it is for us to hear a Jewish voice." Later that night, trying to make sense of the tears and these parting words, I realized its underlying meaning: history had gone too far, there was no way back and no way to heal because the Jewish presence had been removed forever from Germany. The implications of this encounter for Jews and Palestinians are obvious, and this is what shook me when I was invited to speak on the subject of Sabra and Shatila. Will Jewish children tomorrow, when meeting and hearing a Palestinian, voice the same regret,

utter the same cry, a cry which cannot be satisfied because history has gone too far? Unlike the Germans, the horror has yet to be fully - or irreparably - realized.

The hour, though, is very late.

— NOTES —

1. For a somewhat typical response of Jewish progressives to criticism of Israel see David Biale, "The Philo-Semitic Face of Christian Anti-Semitism," *Tikkun* 4 (May/June, 1989): 99-102.
2. For the profile of David Hartman see Michael Kramer, "Sage in a Land of Anger," *Time*, April 30, 1990, p. 90-91. Also see Arthur Waskow, "Twice Promised Land," *Tikkun* 5 (September/October, 1990): 56-58.
3. Documentation of the combination of physical terror and bureaucratic expropriation is found in *Punishing a Nation: Human Rights Violations During the Palestinian Uprising, December 1987-1988* (Palestine: Al Haq, 1988).
4. Abba Eban, *Intr. The Beirut Massacre: The Complete Kahan Commission Report* (New York: KARZ-COIL, 1983), pp. V-XVI.
5. Irving Greenberg, "The Ethics of Jewish Power," *Perspectives* (New York: National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, 1988), p. 10. For extended analysis of Holocaust theology see Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation: The Uprising and the Future* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1989) and Marc H. Ellis, *Beyond Innocence and Redemption: Confronting the Holocaust and Israeli Power* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990).
6. *Ibid.*
7. For a discussion of the Jewish tradition of dissent and its limitations see Ellis, *Beyond Innocence*, pp. 56-94.
8. A. B. Yehoshua, *Between Right and Right Israel. Problem or Solution?* trans. Arnold Schwartz (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 101, 105.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 107-147.
10. These themes are articulated most clearly as a consensus progressive Jewish position by Michael Lerner, editor of the journal *Tikkun*. See Lerner, "The Occupation: Immoral and Stupid," *Tikkun* 3 (March/April 1988): 7-12.
11. Amos Oz, "Make Peace, Not Love," *American-Israeli Civil Liberties Coalition* 10 (Summer 1990): 15.
12. For the development of this theme see Mohammed Hallaj, "The Palestinian Dream: The Democratic Secular State," in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marc H. Ellis, eds. *Beyond Occupation: American Jewish, Christian and Palestinian Voices for Peace* (Boston: Beacon, 1990), pp. 220-230.
13. On the diversity and complexity of Jewish behavior in the ghettos of Eastern Europe see Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Stein and Day, 1977). For a dialogue on the shifting of the burden onto Palestinians see "Special Focus on Iraq," *Tikkun* 5 (November/December 1990): 48-78.
14. Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World*, trans. Peter Mann (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 19.
15. For a discussion of the ecumenical deal in church circles see Marc H. Ellis, "The

Ecumenical Deal and the Bishops Middle East Statement," *Ecumenical Trends* 19 (March 1990): 33-36.

16. The reality of ethnocide has prompted me to call for an end to the ecumenical dialogue. See Marc H. Ellis, "End This Dialogue," *Tablet* 244 (June 30, 1990): 810. Also see Leon Howell, "Hard Talk on the Middle East," *Christianity and Crisis* 50 (July 2, 1990): 211-212.

17. For an early discussion of these themes, see A. Roy Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967). Also see Paul M. van Buren, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel, Part II* (New York: Seabury, 1983).

18. Robert McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel: Messenger to All Humanity* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 2-3.

Brown dedicated his book to Wiesel; it reads in part: "You have said that to be a Jew means to testify; such must also be the obligation of a Christian. And you have taught us all—Jews, Christians and all Humanity—that before testifying ourselves, we must listen to your testimony. And...to testify."

19. Robert McAfee Brown, "Christians in the West Must Confront the Middle East," in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marc H. Ellis, *Beyond Occupation* (Boston: Beacon, 1990), pp. 139-142. Also see Brown's earlier article "Speaking About Israel: Some Ground Rules," *Christian Century* 105 (6 Apr. 1988): 338-40.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-154.

22. Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, 258, 225. Ruether ends her book with a proposal to

reform current theological curricula about the Jews. She includes teaching the Jewish scriptures from a Jewish perspective, correcting the stereotypes of the Pharisees and thus the myth of blood guilt, and studying the way theological anti-Jewishness has been translated into social and political oppression (pp. 259-61).

23. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), xix, 244.

24. *Ibid.*, 20.

25. Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Beyond Anti-Semitism and Philo-Semitism," in Ruether and Ellis, *Beyond Occupation*, p. 289.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Ruether & Ruether, *Wrath of Jonah*, 237.

Book Views

We Belong to the Land

By Elias Chacour

with Mary E. Jensen

San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990, \$16.95 (cloth)

Beyond Innocence

and Redemption

By Marc H. Ellis

San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990, \$21.95 (cloth)

Reviewed by George Martin

These are, on the surface, two quite dissimilar books: one by a Palestinian Melkite priest and the other by an American Jewish scholar; one biographical in structure and passionate, even intemperate, in tone; the other a footnoted survey of theological reflections on the Holocaust and the modern state of Israel.

Yet these two books converge in a hope that there can be reconciliation between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples, allowing them to live together in justice and peace. They understand their common hope in light of their respective religious heritages, as a integral consequence of their deepest beliefs.

We Belong to the Land, like Chacour's earlier book, *Blood Brothers* (Grand Rapids, Chosen, 1984), uses a biographical framework to tell

the story not only of the author but of his people. Chacour was born in 1939 in the Christian Palestinian village of Biram, near the present border of Israel with Lebanon. In November 1948 Israeli soldiers evicted everyone from the village, telling them it was a temporary security measure and that they would be allowed to return to their homes in two weeks.

They were never allowed to return: Biram was one of a number of Palestinian villages emptied and destroyed because it lay close to the border with Lebanon. Benny Morris summarizes their expulsion with scholarly objectivity in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 237-243). Chacour speaks of it in highly personal terms: it is his story, his family's tragedy. His book proclaims, "We belong to the land" — and yet have been and are being evicted.

Since 1965 Chacour has been the Melkite pastor of the village of Ibbilin, 10 miles northwest of Nazareth. His book recounts anecdotes from these 25 years — glimpses of Palestinian life in Israel, echoes of Palestinian voices. Everyone in the West thinks we are trying to drive the Jewish people into the sea," one parishioner tells Chacour, "when it is we Palestinians who are being driven out" (p. 132).

Often the anecdotes are occasions

for Chacour to express his own views. "Remember your roots in Galilee," he tells a group of children at a summer camp. "Your Palestinian ancestors planted these trees and loved this land. It is from this land you have been removed and to this land you will someday return. From this land God took human form. In this land Jesus of Nazareth gave his blood for the redemption of the world. Perhaps you will have to do something with your blood to redeem Jews and Palestinians and to create an environment of negotiation, love, and tolerance" (p. 95). Chacour is committed to nonviolence, to reconciliation between Jew and Palestinian, to creating a partnership of equals — "compatriots who belong to the land and to each other" (p. 205).

Chacour is an activist, not afraid to build a school without a permit and thereby create a "fact on the ground." He is bold to the point of brashness, even in telling his bishop what he thinks. The prophet Elijah was called a "troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17), and passed his mantle on to the prophet Elisha. Elias Chacour, named after the prophet, carries on a prophetic tradition of troubling the authorities in the name of truth and justice — and in the name of hope.

Beyond Innocence and Redemption also bears a resemblance to an earlier work: Ellis' *Toward a Jewish*

Theology of Liberation (New York: Orbis, 1987). Both survey and summarize a variety of theological perspectives on the Holocaust. Beyond Innocence and Redemption has two chief focal points, however; the second is the modern state of Israel. Ellis views the Holocaust and the creation of the state of Israel as the key events of Jewish life in the 20th century, and their linkage as a significant factor in defining the nature of the state of Israel.

Ellis raises troubling questions: is the Holocaust "increasingly becoming a servant of empowerment, justifying almost any form of empowerment including occupation and beating, deportation, and humiliation of the Palestinian people? In speaking of our innocence and redemption does Holocaust theology remain naive about the history we have created in Israel even well before the Palestinian intifada?" (p. xiv).

Thomas Friedman would answer questions like these rather curtly: "Israel today is becoming Yad Vashem with an air force. The Holocaust is well on its way to becoming the defining feature of Israeli society" (From Beirut to Jerusalem, New York, Farrar Straus Giroux, 1989, p. 281).

Ellis' approach is that of a scholar, surveying the historical development

of both Holocaust theology and Zionism. If Chacour uses anecdotes as the springboards for his views, Ellis uses the thoughts of others. If Chacour allows us to eavesdrop on his prayers and hear his anguished dialogues with God, Ellis gives us his summaries and critiques of other writers. His book is an invitation to dialogue, beginning within the Jewish community — a dialogue about what the state of Israel has become and what it should be.

Like Chacour, Ellis calls for solidarity between Jew and Palestinian as the way of hope: "The Palestinians have been done a great historical wrong by the Jewish people. The only way forward, it seems, is a solidarity with the Palestinian people that is both confessional and political... the task of Jewish theology is to lay the groundwork for solidarity" (p. 157).

Ellis' own proposals for a theological groundwork for solidarity will be controversial within the Jewish community: he calls for "deabsolutizing" both the state of Israel and the Holocaust (p. 187). Israel should be seen as "a state like any other, capable of good and bad but unworthy of ultimate loyalty" (p. 188). The Holocaust should be understood as a call "to end the suf-

fering of the Jewish people and all peoples, including and especially the Palestinian people" (p. 187). Ellis does not develop these lines of thought at length; they rather function as the terminal points of his book's journey.

Such conclusions invite exploration and development. Ellis would suggest that the next stage of the journey must be traveled by Jews and Palestinians together: "the Jewish people can only move forward with the victims of Jewish empowerment, the Palestinian people" (p. 184). This means coming to grips with the Palestinian experience: "When today we speak of the formative events of Holocaust and Israel, Jews need to add the experience of the Palestinian people as a formative event for the Jewish people as well" (p. 189). We have come full circle, to Chacour's expression of the Palestinian experience, mirrored in his life and yearnings: "We are compatriots who belong to the land and to each other. If we cannot live together, we surely will be buried here together. We must choose life" (We Belong To The Land, p. 205).

George Martin is editor of *God's Word Today*.



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