

Ideo-Theology and the Jewish State

From conflict to conciliation?

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Abstract

The assassination of Israeli premier Yitzhak Rabin provided the most vivid demonstration to date of religious-nationalist opposition inside Israel to the principle of exchanging land for peace. This article sets out to explore this world view and its intellectual origins, exploring in the process how the use of sacred Judaic texts have become both the monopoly of religious-nationalism and the template for politically inspired violence against those in Israel suspected of condoning territorial compromise. This article concludes that if the ideotheology of religious-nationalists is to be assuaged, a religious discourse supporting territorial retrenchment has to become part of the political fabric of the centre-left in Israel.

Introduction

The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on 4 November 1995, was the most public demonstration to date of active resistance by Israel's religious-nationalists to Israeli concessions over the West Bank and Gaza Strip since the signing of the Oslo Accords. The concern of this paper, however, is not so much with groups and organisations associated with religious-nationalism in Israel such as *Gush Emunim*(1). Rather, it concentrates upon what can be termed the hermeneutics of ideo-theology - a term applied traditionally to the discovery of real but hidden meanings in sacred texts -that encapsulates the fusion of biblical precedence, *halachic* jurisprudence and the belief that Zionism as a largely secular ideology heralds the beginning of the messianic era. As Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir, declared in his testimony before a commission of enquiry into his slaying of Rabin, in the absence of a *halakhic* legitimacy bestowed by some rabbis condoning violence against the profane, his murder of the Israeli premier would have been illegitimate.(2)

This paper concentrates on the ideas underpinning this worldview, ideas that have increasingly come to accommodate and condone the use of violence as a pro-active means of forestalling any moves that may retard the messianic process. Certainly, recent surveys have suggested that religious-based opposition to the Oslo Accords, among both religious-nationalists and more traditional *haredi* Jewish groups associated with non-Zionist parties has increased markedly since the election of Binyamin Netanyahu in May 1996. This development gives cause for concern, not least because differences over Zionism as an ideology have hitherto denied a consensual approach among religious Jews towards the issue of the occupied territories and the Palestinians.⁽³⁾ Accordingly, the hermeneutics of ideo-theology, as well as its physical symbols are important because they occupy a realm removed from the discourse of mainstream Zionism and, therefore, remain impervious to secular arguments regarding the sagacity of exchanging land for peace.⁽⁴⁾

In exploring these issues, this paper concludes that if the ideo-theological cleavages in Israeli society are to be assuaged two parallel developments are required. Firstly, a religious discourse condoning territorial compromise and conciliation has to invade the space now dominated by the religious right. This is not to suggest extremist individuals can ever be convinced of the acumen of territorial compromise on theological grounds. The importance of such a dialogue lies, nonetheless in demonstrating to both Israelis and Palestinians that Judaism can, and indeed does, accommodate the demands of territorial compromise. Secondly, the centre-left in Israel, largely associated with secular, middle class Israelis of Ashkenazim origin, has to engage seriously in an ideo-theological discourse. This has to go beyond the mere symbols of Judaic piety, such as the inclusion of dovish rabbis as part of their political community. Rather, it has to be inclusive of religious-Zionism, willing to embrace its central tenets at both cultural and political levels. Failure to engage ideo-theology as a bridging identity to other groups in Israeli politics can only reinforce the current atavistic monopoly over hermeneutical interpretation exercised by religious-nationalists towards the peace process. The implications of such a development, of what Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz once termed 'Judeo-fascism' remaining unchallenged, would indeed be onerous for the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The Development of Ideo-theology

The conviction that Zionism was the necessary precursor to what religious-nationalists believed was the arrival of the messianic era found a particular resonance after 1967. The

capture of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the biblical heart of *Eretz Y'Israel* against apparently overwhelming odds soon acquired messianic overtones. *Gush Emunim* for example saw the war as deliverance of *Eretz Y'Israel* from what were termed the *Sitra Achra*, the evil side. In particular, Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook, the son of Rabbi Avraham Kook, placed Israel's military triumph within the continuing evolution of the messianic era. His vision encompassed a preordained Jewish right to settle the newly captured territories, a process that was encouraged by Rabbi Zvi Kook among the students of the *Yeshivat Merkaz Harav* in Jerusalem. They were to spearhead the early settlement drives, leading to the establishment of such settlements such as Kiryat Arba next to Hebron.(5) Zvi Kook used the ideas of his father to add theological legitimacy to the use of force in order to achieve and maintain the unity of *Eretz Y'Israel*. These ideas found a receptive audience among the wider religious right, offering as they did a *carte blanche* that divorced settlement activity from any moral or humanistic constraints.

Indeed, the real impact of the religious right was to redefine the normative character of Zionism. While never a single cohesive ideology, Zionism was nonetheless an amalgam of ideas drawn from Jewish philosophy, history, and religion on the one hand, and fused with the universal values of freedom, democracy, and justice for its Jewish citizens, values identified with Western civilisation. While the period 1948-67 never saw the complete synthesis of these ideas, close association with universal values marked the development of an *Israeli*, rather than a *Jewish* identity. The June 1967 marked a watershed in this process with the affirmation of particular Jewish, rather than universal values, in determining the character of the State of Israel.(6) These particularist values increasingly influenced the political agenda in Israel after 1967, a process accelerated by the election of the first Likud led coalition government under Menachem Begin in 1977.(7)

This also led the religious-right, influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Zvi Kook, to reject the theory of normalisation outlined by Herzl and other classical Zionist thinkers. In this respect, the October War of 1973 was of particular significance. If the June Six Day war was interpreted as signifying divine intervention in hastening the process of redemption, the *Yom Kippur War* signified the continued rejection by Gentiles of the Jews as a people, and an attempt to undermine the messianic age into which Jews as a people had now passed.

Maintaining the integrity of the *Eretz Y'Israel* remained the supreme goal of religious-nationalists and formed *the* core component of their ideo-theology. Clear reference was made to the covenant made between God and Abraham regarding the land as an "everlasting

possession”, a promise that is repeated by God, according to the book of *Genesis* to Abraham’s son Isaac and to his son Jacob.(8) As long as successive Israeli governments -albeit on security grounds- continued to value Jewish control over the territories captured in 1967, a clear symbiosis of objectives existed with religious-nationalism. As such, submitting to the secular authority of the Jewish State posed little real difficulty. Nonetheless, by regarding the land as central to the redemptive process of the Jewish people, it followed that any attempt to trade land for peace usurped the will of God, and therefore, would be opposed. This position brought to the fore the centrality of *Halacha*, the doctrine, rules, and laws of Judaism that through the centuries, had been codified into juridical law.

Yet traditionally, *Halacha* has had little to say regarding the sanctity of land, but rather concerns itself with the moral behaviour of Jews, both as individuals and as communities. Indeed, the imposition of violent sanctions against transgressors had been limited to actions of “idolatry, incestuous relationships, and the shedding of blood”.(9) By using a process of analogical reasoning Rabbi Zvi Kook was to apply the actions of idolatry to a wider political setting by invoking *Pikuach Nefesh*, a term that usurps the dictates of *halakha* if threats to life are to be averted. Accordingly, relinquishing land deemed holy not only fell under the remit of idolatry, but increased the danger to the Jewish people as a nation as territory of strategic worth was ceded to the Arabs. Territorial retrenchment therefore fell outside the remit of *pikuach nefesh* since withdrawal would, from their perspective, not entail the saving of Jewish life. The whole issue of *pikuach nefesh* became increasingly salient to the actions of the religious-nationalists as they attempted to resist the implementation of the Oslo Accords by the government of Yitzhak Rabin.

While by no means characteristic of the majority of rabbis associated with Israel’s religious-right, the language used to oppose territorial retrenchment was broad enough in its conceptual base to accommodate extreme acts. In the aftermath of Rabin’s death it emerged that two influential West Bank rabbis, Dov Lior and Nahum Rabinovich had issued a religious edict, declaring the Israeli premier to be a *rodef*. Under *halachic* law it is permissible to kill a *rodef* or persuer if there exists clear evidence that life is endangered. Again, while this ruling originated within the context of Jewish communal life, there existed an all too obvious correlation with the idea of *pikuach nefesh*. As such, this edict further redefined the limits of opposition to justify violent acts.(10) By condoning the removal of Rabin, they were saving Jewish lives while continuing to redeem the land. Moreover, it became clear that in opposing the policies of Rabin’s government, ideo-theology had, among the more radical elements of

the religious-right, encompassed the notion of delegitimizing Rabin as a Jew. The emergence of such a trend was of significance precisely because from a religious perspective, it removed the veil of Judaic legitimacy from Rabin, thus placing him in a gentile world that was never to be trusted. The placards displaying Rabin variously in Nazi regalia or swathed in a *kiffeyeh* at right-wing demonstrations were the more visible aspects of this process.

The sentiments expressed by the activist are the theological legacy of the late Rabbi Meir Kahane, the most radical of thinkers among right-wing religious opinion. Kahane took issue with the prevailing view among the religious-nationalists concerning Zionism as the necessary precursor to the messianic era. In a little read essay, *Hillul Hashem*, published in 1976 Kahane maintained that the Jewish State was established not because of the righteousness of the Zionist cause, but rather because God could no longer tolerate the continued persecution of his chosen people by Gentiles. Thus Israel was created by God as a punishment to the Gentiles, not a reward to the Jews. But this also led Kahane to conclude that the new born State was virtuous not because Zionists were a pious people -clearly they were not- but because of what a Jewish State “inflicts upon the Gentiles”.(11)

Building upon this unique interpretation of historical events, Kahanism reinterpreted the *halachic* concepts of *hillul hashem*, and *kiddush hashem*, placing them within an extreme nationalist milieu. The former refers to the humiliation suffered by God when the Jews, irrespective of moral behaviour and religious adherence, are subject to repression. Conversely, when the Jews are strong, God’s power is revealed and his name sanctified - *kiddush hashem*. This was a radical departure from accepted orthodoxy surrounding a term that condoned martyrdom as the ultimate act in sanctifying God’s name. Instead, Kahanism saw sanctification of God’s name in the very act of killing those opposed to the Jewish people. As Kahane went on to explain *kiddush hashem* now represented ‘A Jewish fist in the face of an astonished Gentile world that had not seen it for two millennia, this is *Kiddush Hashem*.’(12)

In a very real sense, Kahanism views violence as a cleansing process, one that has set the Jewish people free from the persecution and servitude of the diaspora. Kahanism consciously adopted a metahistorical approach which applied the term *amalekh* to describe all enemies, past, present, and future of the Jewish people. The *amalekh* were a biblical tribe whose destruction was demanded of the Israelites by God according to the *Torah*(13). As such the term was applied by Kahane to include all enemies of the Jewish people in general, and the Palestinians in particular. Therefore, if God’s name is to be sanctified, it is incumbent upon the Jews to destroy the *amalekh*, thus ushering in the true messianic era.

Such sentiment nonetheless underlined that concessions over territory threatened the religious-right and their explanation of what it actually meant to be an Israeli. In this respect, the language of the religious-right was crucial in creating an environment that not only condoned active civil disobedience, but, through the prism of its ideo-theology, sanctified recourse to violence.

Ideo-theology: From Civil Disobedience to Violence

The signing of the Oslo Accords on 13 September 1993, brought in its wake an increased propensity for the religious-right, organised into extra-parliamentary opposition groups, to engage increasingly in acts of civil disobedience. The Accords presented religious-nationalists with the stark choice between recognising the temporal authority of a recidivist state, or active opposition based upon the logic of their ideo-theology.

The ideas surrounding *hillul hashem* had a particular resonance among the settlers of Kiryat Arba, a settlement overlooking Hebron and renowned for the militant activism of some of its members. Continued tension between Jew and Arab in Hebron was equated with the metahistorical struggle against the *amalekh*, a confrontation that Kahanist logic embraced if God's glory was to be redeemed; *kiddush hashem*. The massacre of 29 Palestinians by Baruch Goldstein was therefore entirely consonant with the most radical interpretation of Kahanist ideo-theology. The community of Kiryat Arba not only felt itself threatened in a physical sense by the overwhelming Palestinian presence in Hebron, but also by the spiritual atrophy of a secular State that had negated the redemptive process. Indeed, it was reported that on 24 February 1994, on the eve of the festival of *Purim*, a crowd of Palestinians approached the Tomb shouting "*Itbah al-yahud*", death to the Jews, an incident thought to have provoked Goldstein's bloody actions. The massacre has to be understood, therefore, within the context of a Kahanist interpretation of *hillul hashem*, and not solely as a brazen attempt to destroy the peace process.(14)

The clarion call to resist the authority of the secular state remained, nonetheless, a constant theme among the religious right. From being the spiritual and territorial vanguard of settlement -the religious heirs to a pioneering tradition- the religious-right saw their chimera of redemption sacrificed to the *amalekh* on the alter of political expediency. Influenced by an ideo-theology that refuted normative values in dealing with the Israel-Palestine dispute, the actions of Yigal Amir on 4 November 1995, were in a very real sense pre-ordained.

Ideo-theology and Netanyahu

The election of Netanyahu to office in May 1996, not suprisingly, was welcomed by the religious right in Israel. His electoral triumph, while narrow, has been seen as a palliative to the secular nemesis that threatened the integrity of *Eretz Y'Israel*. While settlers remain apprehensive regarding the scope of future Israeli withdrawals on the West Bank, Netanyahu's evident distaste for wholesale territorial concessions, visibly demonstrated in the virtual demise of the Oslo process, has done much to assuage their anger.(15)

This dissipation of anger is more than just the persona of 'Bibi' himself. It is also a reflection of the continuing right-wing shift in the position of the National Religious Party (NRP), the embodiment since the late 1960s of the religious-nationalist agenda. Indeed, many of its members, both inside the Knesset and outside, enjoy close association with *Gush Emunim*. The recent death of veteran party leader Zevulun Hammer has brought to the fore Rabbi Yitzhak Levy. As founder of the extreme *Matzad* faction within the NRP, Levy has previously made clear his opposition to allowing Arab Knesset members the right to vote on the Oslo accords, and has favoured the forced 'repatriation' of Palestinians in the occupied territories to other Arab states.

This perceptible shift by the NRP to the right has been allied with a greater emphasis placed by the leadership towards consulting rabbis over issues of political, as well as religious importance. As such, concern has been raised over the position of former Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Mordechai Eliahu, a close confidant of Levy whose invocation of *pikuakh nefesh* in opposing territorial retrenchment from the occupied territories has caused considerable disquiet. Two explanations can be given to explain the NRP's position. The first involves naked political opportunism; the fact that Levy is the first Jew of Oriental origin to head the NRP suggests that he can appeal to those haredim loyal to SHAS, the main orthodox party of the Oriental Jewish community; the second reason is that evidence exists to suggest opinion among both Oriental and Ashkenazi *haredi* communities is resolutely opposed to Oslo. They accept the religious-nationalist argument that retrenchment from the territories has not resulted in *pikuah nefesh* -the saving of Jewish lives- and that further Israeli withdrawal from the territories should be discontinued. This is not to suggest that the *haredim* per se have changed their position which regards Zionism as antithetical to the realisation of the messianic age. Rather, it is to suggest that greater Judaic piety on the part of the NRP, coupled with the belief that Palestinians remain bent on destroying the Jews, has created a synergy of

political interest in the Knesset among and between members of these two distinct religious traditions that is inimical to advancement further of the peace process.(16)

This merger of two previously distinct religious traditions has been apparent for some time. One commentator of Israel's internal political milieu highlighted the extent to which the NRP has begun to discard its previous tolerance of Israel's predominantly secular culture in favour of a rejectionist stance that eschews modernity in favour of a political and social order based upon *halakha*. It was noted that if the *haredim* had begun to be influenced by the ideology of religious-nationalism, then religious-nationalists represented by the NRP had been exposed to '*haredization*'.(17) Certainly, comments by Levy that Israel's political system be run in accordance with *halakha* appeals to the finite world view of the *haredim*, a view anathema to the mainly secular outlook held by most Israelis.

Countering Religious Nationalism

There are those who refute the validity of *halacha* in determining any discourse among a largely secular populace. Meron Benvenisti, former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, has dismissed *halacha* on historical grounds, the claim being that it emerged as a means of ensuring social and communal cohesion of Jews following their dispersion in approximately 70AD. Having emerged as a response to the conditions of Jews in the diaspora, *halacha* is, according to Benvenisti, irrelevant to questions regarding the sanctity of land because it never referred to a given territory inhabited by the Jews as a cohesive nation.(18) While a rational argument in a chronological sense, this overtly secular view ignores the reality of a situation where *halacha* has come to exert enormous influence as a commentary on the *Torah* and *Talmud* regarding the absolute spiritual value of territory. Many secular Israelis point to the extreme form of proportional representation that has led to a situation in which religious-nationalists and *haredi* political groupings have changed the normative basis of Israel's political discourse. Accordingly, they argue that the centre-left should agitate for a clear separation between the temporal and spiritual in Israeli political life if the developing *kulturkampf* within Israeli society is not to manifest itself in more extreme ways.(19) While such sentiment is supported widely among some sections of Israeli society two main impediments, one political, one social, negate any such separation. Politically, the demands of building and maintaining a coalition government negate the introduction of a law inimical to the worldview of *haredi* parties and NRP alike. Secondly, it is not at all clear that even if a coalition government could coalesce around laws separating religion from state, it

would actually enjoy broad popular appeal. The rigid distinction between secular and religious is not an accurate reflection of attitudes towards religion among Israelis. It has been estimated that up to 40 percent prefer the epithet 'traditional', a term that encompasses a benign attitude towards Judaism as a religion, but falls short of strict observance of Jewish rituals.(20) In this respect, religion has come to play an increasingly important part in moving the idea of Israeli national identity beyond its original ethnic template. *Halacha* remains therefore a crucial element in challenging the ideo-theology of the religious-right, demonstrating that the well-being of the people takes precedent over the sanctity of the land.

Questioning the use of *pikuach nefesh* in this context is important because it removes the sanctity of the land as an absolute value from the redemption for the Jewish people and places the latter on a higher plane. This view was also put forcefully by Rabbi Yehuda Amital, one-time member of *Gush Emunim* whose maximalist views regarding the sanctity of the land underwent a "Road to Damascus" conversion following the shock registered at the scale of Israel's casualties during the Lebanon war.(21) Amital also raised his concern that the use of *halacha* as a prism to interpret reality remained potentially explosive, particularly among those who viewed it as an absolute set of truths, removed from a particular historical and social context.

Amital now heads *Meimad* (Dimension) , a religious nationalist party formed in 1988 from former members of the NRP disenchanted with its close association with *Gush Emunim*. Amital declared recently that it was the duty of *Meimad* 'to remind the general public as well as the religious public that not all the religious [Zionists] have adopted the extremist views of the religious parties'.(22) This reference to extremist views refers not only to the NRP position over the occupied territories but also the process of atomisation that is seen to remove the party and its constituency from mainstream Israeli society.(23)

Problematic for *Meimad* until now has been the perception that its desire to engage in a critical dialogue with a secular constituency has undermined a sustained critique of a modernity deemed antithetical to the demands of Judaic probity. It is now widely recognised that if *Meimad* is to accrue wider political support at least among Orthodox Jews, a clear distinction has to be made between the application of *halakha* in Israel's domestic affairs, and its application in justifying territorial retrenchment. As one commentator of *Meimad's* renewed vibrancy noted:

After Rabin's murder, even those who in principle would prefer to join a non-religious party are likely to want moderate religious representatives in the Knesset, to prove to the public at large we[religious-Zionists] are not of all the NRP's ilk. On the other hand, religious Jews who support the peace process remain uninvited guests on the left. Much depends on Meimad's platform. But this time, an appeal to vote for Meimad will fall on more receptive ears.(24)

Meimad activists have begun to work towards this end. Some have become involved in an orthodox group called *Yesodot* (Foundations) which aims to impart democratic values to students of all ages in religious-Zionist schools by demonstrating that *halakhic* jurisprudence and democracy are complimentary. Accordingly, emphasis is placed upon the study of interpretations of sacred Judaic texts and the veracity of applying such interpretations to the present context of Israeli politics.(25) One of the main political pillars of Meimad, that *Eretz Yisrael* is the land promised to the Jewish people by God in perpetuity would appear inimical to trading land for peace. Such 'absolutism' however, is conditioned by the value placed by *Meimad* on the preservation of life, including the avoidance of war and bloodshed, according to the *Torah*. Accordingly, life is placed above land, leading to a more liberal interpretation of *pikuach nefesh* that places the safety of the people of Israel and the unity of the state above total control of the land. The religious scholar and peace campaigner Avi Ravitsky summed up this argument when he noted the following:

I believe there is another face to Judaism; when peace and the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the human being comes prior to the integrity of the land, I do not give back the land metaphysically, but politically we have to live here side by side [with the Palestinians]. I do not want to kill and I do not want to be killed in the name of the *Torah*. I believe that some orthodox radical Jews are corrupting the use of the *Torah* with regard to the peace process. (26)

If *Meimad* is to act as an effective foil to the dominant ideothology of the religious-right however, much may depend on making common cause with religious peace organisations such as *Netivot Shalom/Oz ve Shalom* (Paths to peace/Courage and Peace). While not denying that the Jews have a covenant with God regarding ahistorical possession of the land, *Oz ve Shalom* argue, however, that there exists a biblical precedent for the ceding of land in exchange for peace. It is mentioned in Genesis that Abraham gave land to the shepherds of Lot in settling a dispute over grazing rights, a precedent that according to David Hall-Cathala suggests that, "divine promise cannot be equated with the actual ownership of the land".(27)

Given the shifting nature of the borders that marked the Hebrew Kingdoms of David and Solomon, *Netivot Shalom/Oz Ve Shalom* have concluded that it is impossible for settler groups to claim sanctity over a defined territory.

Accordingly, *Netivot Shalom/Oz ve Shalom* have placed emphasis on universal values to be found in Judaism, including the belief that all “human beings were created in God’s image and are worthy of being treated with dignity, respect, and compassion”.(28) It follows from this that what sanctifies any territorial space is not the land itself, but rather the quality of a society built upon that land and the treatment of its population.. The enforced slavery of the Children of Israel as described in the book of *Genesis* is cited as proof of God’s approbation when Jews failed to adhere to such strictures. If Israel is to fulfil the prophetic vision of being a “light onto the nations” it cannot continue to occupy or dehumanise another people.(29) This contrasts sharply with the apocalyptic vision of the *amalekh*, while challenging the normative values represented by the hermeneutics of the religious-nationalism.

Netivot Shalom members also deny that priority be given to *halakha* over the laws of the secular state. Indeed, they regard the two as immutable, with democratic ideals associated with the secular state clearly congruent with *halakhic* practice to be found in Jewish communities or *Kehilot* from the tenth century onwards. *Kehilot* developed internal leadership and institutions composed of elected officials that catered to the civil and social needs of their respective polities. This practice, while deriving every-day sovereignty from the people, gained legitimacy under continued innovations in *halakhic* jurisprudence. Laws or regulations passed by elected bodies within *Kehilot* assumed binding status on all members of the community, a position enforced by such laws acquiring the authority of *din torah* (Toranic law). According to Dr Lucien Lazar of *Netivot Shalom*, Israel in its present political configuration is, by definition a *halakhic* state, its democratic tradition based upon, and indivisible from, authority vested in freely elected representatives of the people. Lazar went on to note that, ‘Whosoever rises and preaches a doctrine of disobedience of a legitimate authority, on the grounds that such and such an order is in violation of halakha, is destroying with his own hands the basis of halakha and the sources of legitimate authority, and turning his back on the Jewish tradition.’(30)

Such arguments are not new to Israeli politics, but their influence has remained secondary to a debate that has concentrated upon the strategic rationale behind Israel’s control over the occupied territories. Even after the Shamgar Commission -set up to investigate the Hebron massacre- warned publicly of the potential for settlers and their supporters to engage in acts

of terror, concern in Israel remained centred on the strategic threat posed to the security of the state by the autonomy proposals, rather than countering the growing militancy among elements within the religious-nationalist camp.(31) In July 1993, a symposium organised by the United States Institute for Peace on the Israel-Palestine conflict concluded that “more can be done in advancing peace in areas of conflict through work with religious bodies and communities”.(32) While the conference was aimed at promoting interfaith dialogue between Jew and Muslim, Rabin’s assassination demonstrated that intra-faith dialogue among Israelis had to be accorded at least equal importance.

Conclusion

Religious-nationalism, quiescent in the immediate aftermath of Rabin’s death remains a potent force that, however unintentional, can only have drawn support from the carnage visited upon Israel’s streets throughout February and March 1996. Such attacks demonstrated to a community whose agenda remained mortgaged to retention of the West Bank and Gaza that only territorial entrenchment could ensure *pikuach nefesh*. If moves towards a regional settlement are to progress forward, it remains incumbent upon the centre-left in Israel at least to engage the ideo-theology of religious-nationalism on its terms, using its vocabulary. Demonising religious-nationalists, both as individuals and groups, cannot but fail to undermine their beliefs or heal at least some of the cleavages in Israeli society. One commentator noted somewhat bitterly that the present Labour alignment leader, Ehud Barak, ‘misses every opportunity to speak about peace in Jewish terms’.(33) Debating whose Judaism, whose interpretations of sacred texts, whose values should apply, a discourse conducted openly at a national level, has to be therefore part of a broader political panacea if the ideo-theology of religious-nationalism is not to become Israel’s nemesis.

This does question the wisdom of those located primarily among Israel’s centre-left who seek a clear separation between religion and the state. It suggests that a theocratic tradition has to become an enduring feature of centre-left’s political culture. But the fact that both the *Torah and Halakah* can accommodate and actively promote reconciliation between peoples *-ve-ahavta la’ger-* and in the process become a bridging identity among large sections of Israeli society does suggest that a humane Judaism, firmly located within the wider Zionist debate, can provide a constructive force for change both inside Israel, and in the broader context of Middle East politics. As one noted observer of Israel’s political scene remarked, ‘If [ideo-theology] combated in its own terms, with interpretations of Jewish tradition that make

Judaism the friend of democracy, pluralism and life over land - not the enemy of those values - then Judaism can still save the Jewish State.'(34)

Notas

1. Accounts concerning the emergence and influence of the settlers movement *Gush Emunim* are numerous. For perhaps the most comprehensive see Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.107-66.

2. See the testimony of Yigal Amir before the Official Commission into the Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, *Ha'aretz*, 29 March 1996.

3. See for example Relly Sa'ar, 'Mikhar Ma're Pa'ar Ha'Hadit Gadai Me Oslo' (Study says religious gap widened by Oslo) *Ha'aretz*, 1 December 1997. In another poll conducted for the Israeli Peace Index, 100 per cent of Ultra-Orthodox Jews and 81 per cent of religious-nationalists asked, declared their belief that Palestinians did not harbour genuine desires for peace with the Jewish State. See 'The Peace Index, January 1998', *Ha'aretz*, 2 February 1998.

4. For example, one Jewish Orthodox leader in the West Bank was quoted as saying, "Those who even discuss territorial concessions are committing the sin of 'Profanation of God's name.'" See Mark Tessler, 'Religion and Politics in the Jewish State of Israel', in Emile Sahliyeh (ed), *Religious Resurgence and Politics in the Contemporary World* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p.279.

5. Ehud Sprinzak, 'Fundamentalism, Terrorism, and Democracy: The Case of Gush Emunim', *New Outlook*, Vol.31, No.9 (September-October 1988), p.9

6. This point is made forcefully by David Hall-Cathala, *The Peace Movement in Israel 1967-87* (Oxford: Macmillan/St Anthony's, 1990), pp. 4-5

7. See for example Lenni Brenner, *The Iron Wall: Zionist Revisionism from Jabotinsky to Shamir* (London: Zed Books, 1984), pp. 72-84.

8. The covenant between God and Abraham is made in *Genesis*, Chapter 12, Verse 1-3. Abraham is looked upon as the "father of all". In *Genesis* Chapter 15, Verse 18, God declares to Abraham: "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates". In *Exodus*, Chapter 6, Verse 4 it is made to all the Israelites. "And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers."

9. Sprinzak, *Israel's Radical Right*, p.113.

10. 'Council of Rabbis Denounces Accusations against Fellow Rabbis as "Blood Libel"', *BBC-SWB*, ME/2461 MED/10-11, 15 November 1995.

11. Ehud Sprinzak, 'Violence and Catastrophe in the Theology of Rabbi Meir Kahane: The Ideologization of Mimetic Desire', in Mark Juergensmeyer (ed), *Violence and the Sacred in the Modern World*(London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp.48-9.

12. *Ibid.*, p.50.

13. For the story of *Amalekh* see *Exodus*, Chapter 17, Verse 8-16; *Deuteronomy*, Chapter 25, Verse 17-19. *Amalekh*, though a collective name used to describe a warring tribe, was actually the son of Esau, an opponent of Jacob. Renowned for their underhand methods of combat, the tribe of the *Amalekh* were eventually defeated in battle. The grandson of Amalekh, Agag was eventually captured by Saul and condemned to death. Saul allowed him to live for one day, during which time, so tradition has it, he impregnated two women, one of whom gave birth to Hanon. Consequently, the enemy of the Jews continued to reproduce and multiply every generation. This story fits it neatly with those who regard Arabs as the modern day *Amalekh* who must be destroyed if God's glory is to be revealed. I am grateful to Rabbi Ian Goodhardt of the United Hebrew Congregation Synagogue of Leeds, for explaining the symbolism of *Amalekh*.

14. This point is made forcefully in a profile of Goldstein. See the article 'Hazvavah' (Disaster) *Ma'ariv*, 27 February 1994

15. Nonetheless, a latent propensity for violence still exists. A recent survey among settlers identified 5,500 individuals prepared to engage in acts of violence to resist largescale Israeli concessions in the occupied territories. See Nadav Shragai, 'Alphe Mitnahalim Ba'ad Shimosh Be Alimot' (Thousands of Settlers support using violence) *Ha'aretz*, 30 January 1998. A more bizarre, if no less threatening use of violence was threatened by Kahane Chai. See 'Israeli paper cites Kahane Chai bulletin condoning anti-Arab suicide attacks', *BBC-SWB*, ME/2889 MED/4. This report detailed a ruling by a rabbi associated with Kahane Chai that argued that it was a *mitzvah* to take one's own life if it meant dealing a mortal blow to the *amalekh*. The actions of Goldstein were cited alongside the actions of Samson and the mass suicide of Jewish zealots at Masada as examples where this had been permissible.

16. See for example Lili Galili, 'NRP: Yamina ve Misrakah' (NRP: to the right and to the east) *Ha'aretz*, 22 February 1998; Shahar Ilan, 'Haradim be Katze ha Yamin' (Haredi Jews: out in right field), *Ha'aretz*, 11 March 1998. In the survey quoted by Ilan in her report, no respondents among those Haredim asked supported the idea of land for peace.

17. Charles Liebman, 'Religion and Democracy in Israel', in Ehud Sprinzak and Larry Diamond (eds), *Israeli Democracy Under Stress* (London: Lynne Rienner/Israel Democracy Institute, 1993), pp.282-3.

18. Gerald Butt, 'God in the Palaces: The Growth of Religious Fundamentalism in Israel', *BBC Radio 4*, 17 January 1993. Benvenisti's comments were expressed during an interview for this programme.

19. See for example Doron Rosenblum, 'Kol ha Maered ha Yehudi' (The Voice of Jewish Revolt) *Ha'aretz*, 25 January 1998.

20. Liebman, 'Religion and Democracy', pp.283-4.

21. Ian S. Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), pp.109-110. Lustick makes the point that the impact of Lebanon saw the emergence of a dovish wing within *Gush Emunim* which embraced limited forms of territorial compromise under the scope of *pikuach nefesh*.

22. Shahar Ilan, 'Ha-Rav Amital: Tzionit datit Maree utare Kemo Kach Marshare Agudat Israel' (Rabbi Amital: Religious Zionism is looking more like Kach than the NRP), *Ha'aretz*, 5 August 1997.

23. Yair Sheleg, 'Enlightened Religious Syndrome', *Ha'aretz*, 10 March 1998.

24. Gershom Gorenberg, 'Hisdamnot Meimad' (Meimad's opportunity), *Ha'aretz*, 3 March 1998.

25. See Yossi Klein Halevi, 'Democracy or Theocracy?', *The Jerusalem Report*, Vol.VIII, No.23 (19 March 1998), pp.23-4.
26. Ravitsky comments were made during the course of an interview with Sarah Dunant, *Nightwaves*, BBC Radio 3, 7 May 1997.
27. Hall-Cathala, *The Peace Movement*, pp.149-50.
28. *Ibid.*, p.148
29. Thomas Friedman, 'Land or Life?', *The New York Times*, 19 November 1995.
30. Dr Lucian Lazar, 'Judaism and Democracy: Incompatible or Complementary', *Oz ve Shalom/Netivot Shalom Newsletter*, Jerusalem 1997.
31. Allan E. Shapiro, "A Crossing of the Line", *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 October 1995.
32. Bruce Brill, "Now More Than Ever: What we must do to get Muslims and Jews to trust each other?", *Peace News*, International Centre For Peace in the Middle East, No.29 (January-February 1996), p.9.
33. Gershon Gorenberg, 'Hisdamnot Meimad' (Meimad's Opportunity), *Ha'aretz*, 3 March 1998.
34. Thomas Friedman, "Land or Life?", *The New York Times*, 19 November 1995.