

## Chapter 11

### *A New Covenant*

Both in the period of settlement and in the Revolutionary War, the colonists and rebels understood themselves as a biblical people, the new Israel establishing a new democratic covenant. In the excitement of independence, however, political leaders reached for a more grandiose sense of what they were about. The new nation was a new Rome, practicing republican virtue. They soon pretended, however, that building an empire would not corrupt that virtue.

—Richard Horsley, *Jesus and Empire*

*Dream, Jan 19, 2008:* It is Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. I am the cantor, the person who, standing on the pulpit and facing the *Aron Kodesh*—the cabinet containing the holy scrolls of the Torah—leads the congregation in chanting the sacred prayers. It is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, and it is the climax of the day: the time to chant the *Aleinu* prayer. The Yom Kippur service takes us back to the time of the Temple in Jerusalem. The cantor assumes the role of the High Priest, reenacting the one time in the entire year when he was permitted to enter the innermost chamber, the place where the Ark of the Covenant containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments was housed. As described in Leviticus, this was an elaborate ritual, emphasizing the centrality of cult, priest, and Temple. In modern times, during the chanting of the adoration and commitment prayer of *Aleinu*, the cantor prostrates himself completely before the *Aron Kodesh*,

lying completely prone and touching his head to the floor. This is the one time in the liturgical year that this happens. The *Aleinu* prayer itself, however, is chanted by Jews every day three times a day in the Jewish worship service. As we chant, we bend our knees and bow at the waist as we affirm our devotion to God and our commitment to the covenant that binds both parties.

In my waking life, I had performed this solemn Yom Kippur ritual, as the cantor entreating on behalf of the congregation, on perhaps six occasions. As a worshipper, I have chanted it thousands of times, from childhood through adulthood. In my dream, however, I can't do it. I am standing before the *Aron Kodesh*, about to perform this act, and instead of lowering myself to the floor, I am saying to myself, what am I doing? How can I be prostrating myself in this ritual, and saying these words?

*It is our duty to praise the Master of All  
to acclaim the greatness of the One who  
forms all creation:  
He who did not make us like the nations of  
other lands,  
and did not make us the same as other  
families of the Earth.  
Who did not make our lot like theirs,  
but assigned us a destiny different from all the others.  
And we bend our knees, and bow down,  
and give thanks,  
before the King, the King of Kings,  
the Holy One, Blessed is He.*

Two nights later I have a second dream. In this dream, I am with a group of Christians. We are standing together in a church. I am translating the *Aleinu* prayer for them. It's a kind of "full disclosure" of how we Jews do in fact regard ourselves as the chosen—how we continue to hold ourselves apart and see ourselves as, well, superior. I tell them that for some time I have chosen not to recite this prayer when in synagogue (this is true). Someone remarks humorously that this Jew—me—is now "in"

the Presbyterian Church. In the dream, I feel a vague discomfort about exposing this prayer to non-Jews. What am I doing, I ask myself, revealing this “secret clan” information to people outside the faith? Won’t this contribute to Jew-hatred? Aha, they will say, what we’ve been told is true! The Jews are an exclusive club; they do feel superior to the rest of us, and all along they have been plotting to take over the world!

As dreams go, these two seem easy to interpret. They came to me while I was deep into the writing of this book. At first glance, they each seem to express different ways in which I was struggling with the personal crisis that had begun with my visit to Israel and the West Bank. In the first, to use the Freudian term, it is my “ego” that is speaking. In other words, I am involved in a healthy process of self-examination in a mature, adult fashion. The second is a more classic anxiety dream: the Freudian “super-ego,” an internalized, scolding voice of authority, is punishing me for my disloyal, independent thoughts and actions. It’s telling me to stop this childish rebellion and start following the rules: be faithful to the clan, keep the family secrets, and trust no one from the outside. The second dream is drawing me back into the fold of *Aleinu*.

But there is more here than the dramatization of a personal crisis. The function of dreams is to deepen one’s experience and, sometimes, to help point the way to future behavior. The first dream put me back in the Holy Land, standing before Jerusalem, as we do symbolically at worship, facing in the direction of the Temple site. In the summer of 2006, witnessing the ethnic cleansing being carried out in my name and navigating between the two worlds of West and East Jerusalem, it was as if I were standing before my maker on Yom Kippur, with, as the liturgy goes, “a heart torn and seething.” I felt myself hurled to the ground in sorrow, despair, and humility before the enormity of what I was experiencing. I was asking myself, as one is enjoined to do on the Day of Atonement, “How have I acted toward my fellow human beings? What do I see when, the veil of illusion and self-deception having been ripped away, stripped of my everyday routine and

comforts, I look in the mirror? When I confront my sins of greed, lust, arrogance, and selfishness, what must I do in order to make myself whole with my fellow men and women and with my God, so that I may be inscribed for life in the coming year in the divine book of judgment? That was my existential state that summer.

For me, it was Yom Kippur. On this one day of the Jewish liturgical year, late in the afternoon when the fasting has done its work and the endless repetition of the confessional prayers has worn through our defenses, we read the book of Jonah. Without question, during that summer I lay in the belly of the fish. How was I going to find my way back to solid ground? What was the lesson I was supposed to learn? And—this was the question I was asking myself most of all—what was I to do now?

My second dream set me down here in my present life, and pointed to the future. In dreams, jokes speak the truth. No, I was not converting and becoming a Presbyterian. But in the dream, I am in the church, a location that had been “off limits” to me as a child. In my dream, I had stepped outside of the tribal frame and into the rest of the world. I was, finally, joining the community from which, according to the *Aleinu* prayer, I was supposed to hold myself apart. This would be my future—the work of repentance and renewal, throwing off the old prayer and joining, in community, with “the families of the earth.”

Dreams rip away the veil. If *Aleinu* contains the secrets of the clan, then it is this very secret that needs to be exposed—not to the others but to our very selves—and transcended. As Jews, we have taken tentative steps in that direction. You can still find *Aleinu* in the prayer book of the Reconstructionist movement, the most reformist of the Jewish denominations, but the line “who did not make us like the nations of other lands” has been replaced with “who gave us teachings of truth and planted eternal life within us.” It’s a start, but it is not enough. We must guard against complacency and denial. This sensitivity to the exclusivism of the prayer could lead in a positive direction, but it could also serve to sweep the issue under the rug. For example, Christians, for their part, have retranslated, ignored, or simply omitted from worship

the anti-Semitic passages in the New Testament. But is this act the beginning of a discussion about how we can begin to come together as faith communities, or simply a way to make amends and “smooth out” the historically rough edges of Christian-Jewish relations? Jews can edit out the triumphalism and separatism in *Aleinu*. Christians can excise or try to explain away the anti-Judaism of John 3 and Matthew 27. But is this scriptural sanitation activity “interfaith window dressing” or a genuine clearing away of the old triumphalism in the search for (or return to) a model of a universal human community? Do Jews really want to join the wider community as equals and to let go of our sense of entitlement and our preoccupation with our suffering?

### **A Prophecy of Surprise and Hope**

We turn again to Walter Brueggemann to provide a vision for a new spiritual direction. In a 2008 article entitled “Prophetic Ministry in the National Security State,” Brueggemann writes about “the core of preaching,” namely, the meaning of the Gospel narrative of Christ crucified and risen. “That Friday turn of the world,” he writes, “was the exposure of the vulnerability of God to the violence of the Empire” (286). In this piece, Brueggemann calls for a prophecy of surprise and hope, a vision that can help overcome society’s propensity toward denial and dread. Prophetic ministry, in Brueggemann’s view, invites us to accept our sense of vulnerability. He challenges us to feel discomfort, even agony, about what is happening in our world, and to face a future that, although uncertain, is committed to the creation of something new. This is in contrast to the comfortable refuge sought in the certainty of scriptural authority devoted to the support of our political beliefs, or to the equally comfortable refuge of a shallow humanitarianism. Brueggemann issues a challenge to Christian and Jewish theologians alike who articulate a “theology of certainty that supports empire-building” (311). Thus, in Brueggemann’s vision, “prophetic ministry is neither prediction, as some conservatives would have it, nor social action as

some liberals would have it. Prophetic ministry is to talk in ways that move past denial and that move past despair into the walk of vulnerability and surprise, there to find the gift of God and the possibility of genuine humanness” (295).

My people need to hear this message. It has become a matter of life and death for us to overcome our denial about the seriousness of our situation. It is urgent that we hear the truth spoken by our modern-day Israeli prophets—the Jeff Halpers and Rami Elhanans and Checkpoint Watch Women and Israel Army refusniks who are crying that there is no peace and demanding justice in Israel and in the territories. The time is now—we can’t wait any longer—to expose distortions like “peace process” and “security wall” that disguise land theft and ethnic cleansing. We need to listen to Israelis Uri Avnery and Avraham Burg’s warnings about the growth of, in Avnery’s words, the “violent Israeli Fascism” of the settler movement that has taken control of Israel’s policies in such a profound and destructive way. We need to hear President Jimmy Carter calling the world powers to account when he writes, “In order to perpetuate the occupation, Israeli forces have deprived their unwilling subjects of basic human rights. No objective person could personally observe existing conditions in the West Bank and dispute these statements” (2006, 208–209).

We also need to listen to our Old Testament prophets, whose message is particularly relevant to us today. Like the prophets, we must call for Jewish reform. We must call for a truly “new” covenant, one that will be shared and universal, one that transcends theological or religious categories. Leaving behind fundamental aspects of our covenant will require of Jews nothing less than a reformation—but do this we must. This will not make us Christians—as much as I think that we need to look to Jesus’s ministry for prophetic guidance. Rather, we must make common cause with Christians who seek to join us in this same spirit of community.

Catholic theologian Richard Gaillardetz, in his 2008 *Ecclesiology for a Global Church*, referring to the reforming spirit of the Second Vatican Council of 1962 to 1965, observed that the willingness to open up the conversation about church doctrine

was the result of “a new and positive engagement with the contemporary world” (xviii). This requirement to actively engage is precisely the point. It was true for the imperial context of first-century Palestine, and it is true for twenty-first-century Palestine and the geopolitical context in which it exists. It is in times of sociopolitical crisis that openness to change and to voices of resistance are most needed, and it is also in these periods that these voices are most likely to be silenced. Brueggemann points out that when an oppressive system feels itself threatened it enlists religion in the service of self-preservation (2008). Therefore, it is in those times that prophetic ministry is most urgently required. Gaillardetz asserts that it is prophecy’s function to challenge “a communal vision numb to the gap between what is and what ought to be. It is a community bereft of a ‘prophetic imagination,’ incapable of mourning its failure to live up to the demands of the covenant and incapable as well of hoping for a new and different future” (6).

### **A New Family**

The Gospel narrative provides vivid illustrations. In the prologue to this book, we encountered Jesus in the earliest days of his ministry. The Gospel recounts, “Then his mother and his brothers came: and standing outside, they sent for him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.’ And he replied, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother’” (Mark 3:31–35 [NRSV]).

In 30 CE, the people of the Galilee and Judea were suffering horribly under the heel of Rome. Popular revolts during Jesus’s childhood against Rome and its client rulers were brutally suppressed (Horsley 2008, 81). Villages were burned, people killed or enslaved, and thousands of insurgents crucified. Jesus’s ministry can be seen as a direct response to the cruelty of imperial rule. The

Gospel narratives attest to this suffering in metaphorical fashion: Jesus's exorcisms signify the driving out of the forces of evil that had taken control of Judean society. His healing of illnesses refers to the social consequences of the crushing inequities of imperial subjugation in the form of malnutrition and weakened immunities. The Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus in his earliest pronouncements was thus a *political* statement, referring to the replacement of oppressive Roman domination with a just society. Jesus, therefore, was building a new community based on commitment to universal values of justice: in his idiom, to commit to the coming Kingdom of God is to enter the discipleship of social and political transformation (Horsley 2008). Walter Wink, commenting on the above passage from Mark, observes that here Jesus "offers an alternative: a new family, made up of those whose delusions have been shattered, who are linked, not by that tightest of all bonds, the blood-tie, but by the doing of God's will" (1992, 119).

When experience shatters your assumptions, when crisis forces you to reassess your commitments or the comfort of your political beliefs, you must seek out new or expanded community and linkages. To fail to do so is to lose your moral compass. It also risks disintegration of that community or, worse, its organization around a destructive (and self-destructive) project. This is as true for individuals and families as it is for communities and even entire nations.

When Rami Elhanan and Nurit Peled-Elhanan lost their daughter to a Palestinian suicide bomber, they faced such a crisis. For them, their recovery as a family was inextricably tied to the responsibility they came to feel for their people. Nurit Elhanan spoke to an audience in Tel Aviv, Israel, in 2001:

When my little girl was killed, a reporter asked me how I was willing to accept condolences from the other side. I replied without hesitation that I *had* refused to meet with the other side: when Ehud Olmert, then the mayor of Jerusalem came to offer his condolences I took my leave and would not sit with him. For me, the other side, the enemy, is not the Palestinian people. For

me the struggle is not between Palestinians and Israelis, nor between Jews and Arabs. The fight is between those who seek peace and those who seek war. My people are those who seek peace. My sisters are the bereaved mothers, Israeli and Palestinian, who live in Israel and in Gaza and in the refugee camps. My brothers are the fathers who try to defend their children from the cruel occupation, and are, as I was, unsuccessful in doing so. Although we were born into a different history and speak different tongues there is more that unites us than that which divides us. (Peled-Elhanan, 2001)

This lesson continues to be driven home in the starkest, most agonizing way. At this writing, in early January 2009, during the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, American Jewish academic and peace activist Sara Roy published an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* entitled “Israel’s ‘Victories’ in Gaza Come at a Steep Price” (January 2, 2009). In it, she wrote:

I hear the voices of my friends in Gaza as clearly as if we were still on the phone; their agony echoes inside me. They weep and moan over the death of their children, some, little girls like mine, taken, their bodies burned and destroyed so senselessly.

In nearly 25 years of involvement with Gaza and Palestinians, I have not had to confront the horrific image of burned children—until today. What will happen to Jews as a people, whether we live in Israel or not? Why have we been unable to accept the fundamental humanity of Palestinians and include them within our moral boundaries? Rather, we reject any human connection with the people we are oppressing. Ultimately, our goal is to tribalize pain, narrowing the scope of human suffering to ourselves alone.

Our rejection of “the other” will undo us. We must incorporate Palestinians and other Arab peoples into the Jewish understanding of history, because they are a part of that history. We must question our own narrative and the one we have given others, rather than continue to cherish beliefs and sentiments that betray the Jewish ethical tradition. Israel’s victories are pyrrhic

and reveal the limits of Israeli power and our own limitations as a people: our inability to live a life without barriers. Are these the boundaries of our rebirth after the Holocaust? As Jews in a post-Holocaust world empowered by a Jewish state, how do we as a people emerge from atrocity and abjection, empowered and also humane? How do we move beyond fear to envision something different, even if uncertain?

The answers will determine who we are and what, in the end, we become.

It's life or death. It's our choice between a commitment to empire or to our future as members of a human community. A persistent, steadfast focus on this choice must inform the activities of our faith communities if these religious traditions are going to not only "survive" but be a force for the survival of our species on this planet. Protestant cleric and theologian John Shelby Spong wrote that "Christianity must change or die" (1999). But it cannot be the task of one faith tradition to bring the others along. Christianity has begun to repudiate its doctrine of being the one true faith, and specifically the faith that superseded Judaism. The next step is to forge a community that transcends the barriers that separate one nationality, ethnicity, or faith community from another. In making sense out of the story of Jesus's death, Spong asserts that in Christian theology, Jesus's transformation into the Holy Spirit "became a sign of the intrinsic unity of all human life, creating a community beyond every human difference. The defining marks of the past—tribe, language, race, gender or even sexual orientation—faded. Inevitably, so will the most difficult and painful of all aspects of human behavior, namely, those barriers erected by the religious convictions of human beings" (223–224).

Gaillardetz credits the ancient Hebrew worship of the one God as the foundation for this "global church," a church that transcends faith community and national boundaries, and that establishes devotion to a universal, divine presence in history in opposition to the violence and divisiveness of empire. He cites Brueggemann's piercingly simple insight about the statement of

belief in Exodus 15:18—“The Lord will reign for ever and ever”—as implying its opposite: “and not the pharaoh!” (Brueggemann 2001, 7).<sup>1</sup> In his recent collection *In the Shadow of Empire*, Richard Horsley writes about the theme of deliverance from imperial oppression common to the foundational stories of both the Judaic and Christian traditions. He notes that Passover commemorates liberation from bondage, and Good Friday and Easter celebrate “Jesus’...vindication by God as the true Lord and Savior, as opposed to the imperial ‘lord’ and ‘savior’” (2008, 7).

### A New Framework for Peace

Sabeel founder Canon Naim Ateek advocates an ethos that unites all faiths in a commitment to justice. With the story of his expulsion as a child from his Galilee village as the backdrop, Ateek turns to the Jewish people, challenging us to undertake the work of reconciliation with the Palestinian people. In effect, he is asking us to acknowledge the damage caused by our actions and to share the land. In similar fashion, Ateek challenges his fellow Palestinians to achieve an understanding with the Jewish people based on a common faith in a God of justice. Standing alongside Ateek in this commitment to reconciliation, Marc Ellis also argues for the importance of theology in building this communal future:

Creating a framework for peace between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians demands...a new way of understanding Jewish life in the Middle East. Jewish theology and ethics come into play...If in fact the task of theology is to nurture the questions a people needs to

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1. In Brueggemann’s analysis, this is the beginning of the transformation of ancient Israel into the justice-based and universalist creed that would lay the foundation for the Judeo-Christian faith. The Song of Miriam is a paean to God’s drowning of the Egyptians in the sea. Brueggemann characterizes this song as the culmination of a period in which the deity was seen in military terms, leading his chosen people into conquest (2001, 16). Like Ateek, Brueggemann sees this as a developmental stage. There would be a long way to go, with many twists and turns, to reach the point of rejecting king and empire as the foundation of peoplehood and humanness. We stand at one of those turns today.

ask about the history it is creating, then the task of Jewish theology is clear: to lay the theological groundwork for Jewish life beyond innocence, redemption, and the last stand. To look toward the end of Israel's sense of isolation and abandonment and toward a future of creative integration and independence is to propose what for most Jews seems to be the most paradoxical of options, that is, solidarity with the Palestinian people. (1990, 287)

But why should we view this option as “paradoxical”? There is no viable future for the Jewish people unless and until we can acknowledge the suffering that we have caused and open ourselves to sharing the land with the Palestinians. It is the path that beckons us if we are to escape from the prison of our separateness and self-absorption, from our attachment to an exclusionism and to an identity as God's elect. For the Jews, at this point in our history, the Palestinian people represent the other that we must join with in order to join humanity. Ellis continues, “a Jewish theology of liberation will be developed in a community that includes Jews and others who are not Jewish...In the new Diaspora, no one faith or tradition will predominate. Rather, carrying the fragments and brokenness of different traditions and cultures, those in the new Diaspora will share experiences and hopes, disappointments and possibilities” (287).

When theologian Marcus Borg wrote in 2006 about “the imperial captivity of much of the church in the United States,” he was asking why, even though our reason for going to war violated Christian teachings, millions of Christians did not “throng the streets” in protest in the months leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq (298). In his call for an “emergent” versus a “conventional” church, Borg is advocating this same openness to introspection, self-criticism, and ideological ferment within the faith community itself. This is the value we saw articulated in Williamson's “rule” of conversation for a post-*shoah* theology, in which Christians, if their religion is to be vital and useful, must be free to reform, revise, and reformulate doctrine in direct response to the challenges raised by current events. With respect to the Israel-Palestine conflict, I suggest that we in the

Jewish community and in Israel must consider what a post-Nakba theology would require of us in order to achieve a true and lasting peace in historic Palestine.

### **The Church as a Force for Change**

Borg is reaching for this same commonality of traditions in his depiction of Jesus as a “Spirit-filled Jewish mystic standing in the tradition of the Jewish prophets” (135). Borg is one of a group of contemporary New Testament interpreters that includes Dominic Crossan, Richard Horsley, Neil Elliot, and John Shelby Spong, who are formulating a new vision of Christianity. Like the post-Holocaust revisionists discussed in previous chapters, they seek to overcome the split with Judaism and find common ground in confronting the challenges of modern times. But, unlike the postwar revisionists, their focus is not on correcting the historical sins of Christianity, but on deepening our understanding of Jesus and the early church as a movement opposed to Roman imperial power. Crossan points out that the names for Jesus used in the New Testament were chosen to make very clear the distinction between Rome and the coming Kingdom of God: “Before Jesus the Christ ever existed and even if he had never existed, these were the titles of Caesar the Augustus: Divine, Son of God, God and God from God; Lord, Redeemer, Liberator, and Savior of the World” (2008, 73).

The story of early Christianity is the story of a movement of religious renewal in the quest for social justice in the Mediterranean basin of the first century. This is also our story today, playing out on a global basis. In his contribution to *In the Shadow of Empire*, Horsley points out that Jesus was leading an anti-imperial movement of Jewish renewal. In his chapter in the same collection, Walter Brueggemann emphasizes that the present “hope of the church” is to be found in the prophetic tradition that opposed the power of kings and their alliances with empire. The vision of the Old Testament prophets, asserts Brueggemann, is a peace that comes from a “just economy that is not based on

force or exploitation” (2008, 39). The hope of the church is to be “a community that stands apart from and over against empire.” Brueggemann enjoins the church to “recover its public voice that attests to an alternative rule in the world” (39).

What then is the role of the church to be? Current events require that we address this question on an urgent basis. Horsley questions the received wisdom that Jesus, in advocating nonviolence, was promoting passive nonresistance. The experience of the Iraq war—and has this event not been a “moment of truth” for Americans?—leads Horsley to conclude “that America has indeed been acting as an imperial power. Historians are reminding us how deeply the sense of being the New Rome, as well as God’s New Israel, is embedded in ‘America’s collective identity.’ These recent developments are now leading many Christians who feel uncomfortable about their role as the New Romans to inquire about the relation of the original Rome to the ancient Middle East and in particular about that figure whom the Romans hung on a cross as an insurgent” (Horsley 2008, 77). Neil Elliot, in his chapter in the same book, issues an urgent caution: “We must ask,” he writes, “to what extent the inexorable logic of global capitalism, designed in the United States and enforced by its military power, determines the priorities of churches” (119). Sounding the theme of a return to community, Elliot asks us to recall the “tenement churches” that Paul assembled in contrast to and in defiance of the global imperialism of his time—and of ours.

In his contribution to this collection, Norman Gottwald, writing in the waning days of the administration of George W. Bush, takes aim at “the triumphalism of current American foreign policy” (23). In this regard Gottwald summons the voice of the ancient Hebrew prophets, who articulated a vision of “just community” deeply embedded in the life of ancient Israel. He writes, “the early communitarian life of Israel was responsible for shaping the subsequent course of the Israelite and Jewish people in profound ways...[lending] strength to the later prophetic movement...that sharply criticized the gross abuses of the monarchy and the ostentatious greed of the client classes of big

landowners and merchants” (21). Using these “biblical criteria,” he asserts that modern America has failed the test through its aggression toward relatively powerless countries in South America, Asia, and the Middle East. Gottwald brings his chapter to a close with a remarkable observation, as he trains his focus on one particularly critical spot in the global picture. The United States, he asserts, is very much like ancient Rome in its power and its aggressive stance—not, as some religious voices have wanted to maintain, like ancient Israel, which was in reality a “minor petty kingdom.” It is, however, a “supreme irony” that “the Palestinians of the West Bank most nearly approximate the early Israelites since they occupy the same terrain, practice similar livelihoods, and long for deliverance from the ‘Canaanite’ state of Israel backed by the American Empire” (24).

Prophets state the obvious.

### **Toward Covenantal Community**

As these interpreters make clear, this message is not limited to Christians—the Old Testament prophets took a clear stand against everything represented by empire. Just as it is a distortion of Christian values to use the Bible to support the unjust actions of any state—including the state of Israel—so is it a betrayal of Jewish values to justify collective crimes on the basis of Jewish scripture or Jewish history. Here is where Jews and Christians must make common cause. As Richard Horsley points out, Jesus was calling for a renewal of covenantal community. He points out that this was the covenant for social justice that was created when the Jewish people accepted God’s law. In a previous chapter, we cited Jewish theologian Marc Ellis’s warning that Constantinian Christianity, representing the yoking of imperial power to the religious establishment, has now been joined by Constantinian Judaism and Constantinian Islam. To counteract this, Ellis makes the powerful case for all religious traditions to join together in “movements of justice and compassion across community and religious boundaries” (2004, 217). Redeeming the current global

situation, therefore, depends on the ability of the faith communities to achieve commonality of purpose. Indeed, transcending the group boundaries is part of the process that will help each achieve a true spirit of community within its own ranks.

This is the covenant that calls to us now. It is not the “one covenant” of van Buren and his heirs that links Christians to the exclusivist elements in Jewish tradition, the covenant that separates out—and elevates—one particular faith group from the rest of humankind and that, incidentally, supports Jewish land claims on theological grounds. Rather, it is the prophetic call for renewal and for a return to the community’s support of social justice. In the final chapter, we will consider how this has already begun and identify specific directions and actions for the future of this movement. Before we turn to this, however, we will take a closer look at the social and political situation in Israel/Palestine today, a set of conditions hauntingly evocative of those experienced by the people of first-century Palestine. The Jews of that earlier time, to use Gottwald’s words, “longed for deliverance” from the oppression of Rome. It was a time in which the call for justice was strong, a call that was answered by the rise of a movement of social renewal and resistance to oppression.