
The Desecularization of the Middle East Conflict: From a Conflict between States to a Conflict between Religious Communities

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The Charter of the United Nations disapproves of a practice long a standard feature of human history, one often glorified by history books and religions. Article 2 stipulates:

3. All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered. 4. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

On this view, when Alexander the Great acquired territories ‘with the spear’, deriving from this the right to rule without limitation, he would, according to contemporary law, have to reckon with a war crimes trial. The settlement of land by the tribes of Israel or the conquest of the Middle East by Islamic armies are also violations of current law, though they are transfigured and idealized in religious writings. ‘Conquest no longer constitutes a title of territorial acquisition’, as Graf Vitzthum sums up the modern-day conception of the law in the volume *Völkerrecht* (‘international law’).¹ I would like to look into a case which demonstrates how

¹ Wolfgang Graf Vitzthum (ed.), *Völkerrecht*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2004, p. 26 (translation by the author).

great, even today, the tension can become between this international prohibition on violence and religious claims to a territory, bringing out the political turbulence to which this gives rise. The case considered here is virtually the flip-side of what, by modifying a formulation of Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, we might refer to as the desecularization of state action: 'At the mention of secularization in the context of the emergence of the state, most people think of the [...] declaration of neutrality with regard to questions of religious truth'.² It is the aspiration to neutrality that has increasingly been abandoned in the Middle East conflict. The development of this conflict is practically a yardstick of the growing strength of religions in the present era. But it is also a case that enables us to see how elusive the power of religions within modernity is.

Religions and the prohibition on violence under international law: the case of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967

It all began with a minor imprecision. Following Israel's military victory in the 1967 Six Days' War, the UN Security Council confirmed in Resolution 242 that it is impermissible to acquire territories through war. In order to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, all states must first recognize one another. Second, the UN called for the 'withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict'. In French, which has equal status with English in the UN, this reads a little differently: 'retrait des forces armées israéliennes des territoires occupés lors du récent conflit'. Should Israel merely leave occupied territories or *the* occupied territories as a whole?³ This linguistic imprecision became politically explosive when, in the 1970s, it became bound up with a power shift within Israel.

Despite the clear legal position, the Labour government annexed East Jerusalem immediately after the military victory. However, the government made no move to allow the Arab population of East Jerusalem to vote on this new status or to give them Israeli nationality, as occurred to a limited degree in the case of the Arabs living in the territory of Israel in 1948. Now even

² Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, 'The Rise of the State as a Process of Secularization', in idem, *State, Society and Liberty: Studies in Political Theory and Constitutional Law*, New York, Berg, 1991, pp. 26–46; the cautious way in which Böckenförde expresses himself is worthy of note. In terms of Europe's historical reality, the state has never been neutral with respect to religions.

³ On the resolutions, see John Quigley, *The Case for Palestine: An International Law Perspective*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, revised and expanded edn, 2005, pp. 170ff.

the democratic society of Israel was convinced that it was acceptable to act in line with principles requiring no agreement from the affected population or the international community, according to Meron Benvenisti,⁴ who sat on the Jerusalem city council in the 1970s and collected and published reliable data on developments in the occupied territories for many years.⁵

Most members of the government saw the former territories of the British mandated area as possible objects of exchange in the sense of land for peace, but wished to come to a decision about which areas to return only in the event of a peace treaty with the neighbouring Arab states. Yigal Allon, general and minister, developed a plan to exclude additional territories around Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley from being returned and to populate them with Jewish settlers for reasons of military security.⁶ The 1970s soon saw a quite new development. Religious Zionists began to resettle those areas once part of the biblical land of Israel.⁷ When the Likud party then took power in 1977, the new government aligned itself entirely with the settlers' movement and took charge of further settlement itself. It can only be forbidden to annex foreign land, not one's own, declared Israel's new prime minister, Menachem Begin; it was in Judaea and Samaria, he stated, that Israel came into being.⁸

The attitude of the USA to the settlement of the Occupied Territories also changed over the same period. It was still disapproving under President Jimmy

⁴ See Meron Benvenisti, *Intimate Enemies: Jews and Arabs in a Shared Land*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, p. 34. The entire chapter 'City of Strife' (pp. 1–51) is a vivid account of the tensions in the violently reunified city, in which, for example, the eastern portion was blatantly discriminated against in the city budget.

⁵ See Meron Benvenisti, *The West Bank Data Project: A Survey of Israel's Policies*, Washington, American Enterprise Institute Studies (vol. 398), 1984; idem, *Demographic, Economic, Legal, Social and Political Developments in the West Bank*, Jerusalem, Westview, 1986.

⁶ See Benvenisti, *The West Bank Data Project*, pp. 51ff.; idem, *Intimate Enemies*, pp. 51ff.

⁷ The extent of biblical land fluctuates in the Jewish texts. *Eretz Yisrael* might be the 'Promised' Land of Canaan referred to in the story of the Patriarchs; it might refer to the area actually settled by Israelites or the land defined by the Halakha; it reaches its greatest extent in Gen. 15:18–21: God promises Abraham that He will give his descendants all the land from the Nile to the Euphrates. The land of Israel was holy in the Jewish tradition because it was in the possession of God. God is the possessor of the territory, and the land cannot be sold; Lev. 25:23. In this sense, *Eretz Yisrael* is a 'geotheological' concept, as Gudrun Krämer puts it in *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Conquest to the Founding of the State of Israel*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 5–10; 19–22; 23–26.

⁸ See Quigley, *The Case for Palestine*, p. 176.

Carter. As late as 1978, an internal legal report produced for Congress by the State Department stated that Israel was occupying these territories (Gaza, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and Sinai).⁹ Such territory, the report declared, has a special status under international law. The occupying power is prohibited from settling its own people in the territories under its control. The report referred to the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which Israel was a signatory and which stipulates in Article 49: 'the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies'.¹⁰ In 1980, in a subsequent resolution, 465, the UN Security Council confirmed this provision for the Israeli occupied territories: Jewish settlements, the resolution stated, are unlawful and represent a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention; the settlements must be removed. The conflict was aggravated by the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention of 8 June 1977, in which it was agreed that the rules of the Geneva Convention apply not only to wars between states, but also to a case previously left out of account: armed conflicts in which people 'are fighting against colonial domination and alien occupation and against racist regimes in the exercise of their right of self-determination, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations'. In line with this, Palestinian resistance organizations also had a right to be treated in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, provided that they themselves complied with their rules.

Let us return to the attitude of the USA to the Middle East conflict. In 1981, the newly elected American President, Ronald Reagan, suddenly assessed the situation differently from his predecessor. Two weeks after taking office, he declared, 'I disagreed when the previous administration referred to them [settlements] as illegal – they're not illegal'.¹¹ Certainly, the settlements were an obstacle to peace, but they were not illegal. Israel, as well as the Palestinians, had legitimate claims to these territories. As a result of this new conception, the USA no longer supported the UN in its efforts to enforce its resolutions against Israel. The government of the USA abandoned its neutrality towards Israel's religious pretensions until, in 2004, George W. Bush finally declared, during a visit to Washington by prime minister Ariel Sharon, that the annexations of parts of the occupied territories by Israel were irrevocable and the return of Palestinian refugees was out of the question.¹²

⁹ This may be found on the website of the Foundation for Middle East Peace under: Documents, Opinion of the Legal Advisor, Department of State, 4-21-78 (http://www.fmep.org/documents/opinion_OLA_DOS4-21-78.html).

¹⁰ Adam Roberts and Richard Guelff (eds.), *Documents on the Laws of War*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 318.

¹¹ *New York Times*, 3 February 1981.

¹² 'Statement by the President' of 14 April 2004, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/>

When, after twenty years of martial law, the Palestinians rose up against Israel in the Intifada of 1987, the secular liberation movement of the PLO acquired an active religious competitor. Prominent members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza were unwilling to leave the organization of the rebellion to the PLO and its United National Command (UNC) and brought Hamas into existence in December 1987 – its name an acronym of the Arab term for Islamic resistance movement (*harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya*) meaning ‘zeal’. Just as religious Zionists claimed the occupied territories as the land of Israel, the supporters of Hamas demanded a whole Palestine, undivided, stretching from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. This is the land which the early Muslims handed down to the later generations until the day of resurrection.

The present chapter deals with this shift in the interpretation of the Middle East conflict. To understand this shift, including in a conceptual sense, we may usefully draw on sociological action theory. Every action entails a definition of the situation, which, however, does not necessarily arise from the circumstances themselves.¹³ This does not mean that every situation can be interpreted arbitrarily; actors remain dependent on external conditions. Yet the interpretation is not prescribed by these conditions. Hence, it is a key element of all action that actors define the situation in which they find themselves. This framing of reality provides an outline of a sequence of events – a social script. Viewed from this perspective, the problem arises of when and why the parties to conflict ceased to interpret the Middle East conflict in a secular way and adopted a religious perspective, and how this impacted on their actions. Even a secular conflict can be ‘framed’ religiously. In making this statement, I follow Max Weber, who saw

releases/2004/04/20040414-2.html: ‘The goal of two independent states [...] remains a key to resolving this conflict. [...] It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel. [...] As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.’

¹³ See Hartmut Esser, *Soziologie. Spezielle Grundlagen*, vol. 1: *Situationslogik und Handeln*, Frankfurt, Campus, 1999, p. 63. A concise summary of this analytical model can be found in idem, ‘Die Definition der Situation’, *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* (1996), pp. 1–34.

religion as a case of action by a whole community and whose special features he wished to understand and explain in light of the ‘meaning’ which subjects give to their actions.¹⁴ Religion as the expectation of salvation is not an independent class of actions, but may become attached to a variety of actions, giving rise to specific forms of collective religious phenomena.¹⁵

In line with this, the key evidence that a conflict between states has become a conflict between religious communities is that the parties to conflict now interpret their actions primarily in terms of religion rather than international law. It is this shift with which we are concerned here. My analysis concludes with the thesis that processes of establishing religious communities have played an increasingly powerful role within society since the 1970s and that this has had consequences for the policies pursued by Israel, the USA and the Palestinians. I begin with Israel.

Israel’s wars of redemption

From its beginnings in the nineteenth century, Zionism, which aimed to establish a Jewish nation state in Palestine, inspired objections from orthodox Jews, for whom the ending of the exile was solely a matter for the Messiah. Those who attempt to resettle the Promised Land now are succumbing to the temptations of Satan and wish to ‘force the end’.¹⁶ A Jew in the land of Israel is permitted only to pray and study the Torah. To this day there are Jews, including some in Israel, who therefore see their situation as one of ongoing exile.

There was, however, a rabbi in this camp of the so-called ultra-orthodox who developed a religious reading of the foundation of the secular state of Israel: Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935).¹⁷ From 1921, he was chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi Jews as well as being a devotee of Hasidic mysticism. This mysticism enabled him to interpret the secular Zionist project through the prism of a

¹⁴ See Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, vol. 1, chapter VI: ‘Religious Groups (The Sociology of Religion)’, pp. 399–634.

¹⁵ See Hans G. Kippenberg, ‘Religious Communities and the Path to Disenchantment: The Origins, Sources, and Theoretical Core of the Religion Section’, in Charles Camic, Philip S. Gorski and David M. Trubek (eds.), *Max Weber’s Economy and Society: A Critical Companion*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, pp. 164–82.

¹⁶ As described by Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, translated from the Hebrew by M. Swirsky and J. Chipman, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 40–78 (chapter 2: “Forcing the End”: Radical Anti-Zionism’).

¹⁷ See Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism*, pp. 79–144 (chapter 3: “The Revealed End”: Messianic Religious Zionism’).

particular philosophy of history. The progress of messianism, he asserted, occurs regardless of actors' intentions. In the 1930s, his attempt to bring the secular and the religious together under the roof of a mystical messianism enjoyed little success. This changed with his son Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982),¹⁸ who simplified but also coarsened his father's philosophy of history. His standing was derived from one event in particular. On the national holiday of 1967, three weeks before the Six Days' War, while giving a sermon, he suddenly broke into a lament about the fact that Hebron, Sichem, Jericho and Anathot had been torn away from Israel as a result of the United Nations' partition plan and the subsequent war of 1948. Just three weeks later, Israeli troops corrected this disaster, conquered these very cities in almost miraculous fashion and placed them under martial law. This conquest had been endowed with a religious meaning in advance by Rabbi Kook. The Six Days' War was a 'war of redemption'; the biblical 'Land of Israel' was 'redeemed' from the unbelievers. The younger Rabbi Kook had this sermon to thank for his reputation as a prophet of almost biblical proportions, though what had occurred was in fact more a ritual lament than a prophecy. Every account of the history preceding the religious settlers' movement mentions this event.¹⁹

Students and rabbis at the Kooks' Talmudic school became the avant-garde of the religious settlers' movement and organized the occupation of the promised inheritance of Judaea, Samaria and Gaza in opposition to a hesitant and internally divided Labour government.²⁰ When territories that had been part of the biblical land of Israel were lost in the Yom Kippur war of 1973, they interpreted this as a punishment of secular Zionism, which trusted only in its own policies rather than in God. In response to this setback, which they interpreted as the 'birth pangs of the Messiah', Kook's followers formed the *Gush Emunim*, the 'bloc of the faithful'.²¹ Its historical theology legitimized its taking charge of the settlement of the occupied territories. The settlers' movement was driven by a simple and stirring core idea: 'Redemption is underway – Eretz Yisrael is holy and cannot

¹⁸ See Gideon Aran, 'The Father, the Son, and the Holy Land: The Spiritual Authorities of Jewish-Zionist Fundamentalism in Israel', in R. Scott Appleby (ed.), *Spokesmen for the Despised: Fundamentalist Leaders of the Middle East*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 294–327.

¹⁹ See Gershon Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967–1977*, New York, Henry Holt, 2006, pp. 21–23.

²⁰ See Samuel C. Heilman, 'Guides of the Faithful: Contemporary Religious Zionist Rabbis', in Appleby (ed.), *Spokesmen for the Despised*, pp. 328–62.

²¹ On Gush Emunim, see Gideon Aran, 'Jewish Fundamentalism: The Bloc of the Faithful in Israel (Gush Emunim)', in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed: The Fundamentalism Project*, vol. 1, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 265–344.

be shared with Gentiles – there is an inherent link between settlement of the holy land and hastening the coming of the Messiah – international law does not apply'.²²

This religious Zionism inspired a whole generation of young Jews. Above all else they wished to be more national than the ultra-orthodox and more religious than the Zionists. In this spirit, they forged ahead with the settlement of old biblical areas and towns. Israeli martial law in these territories and the disunity of the Israeli government in this matter bolstered their plans.²³ It was the prevention of a new partition of the land of Israel rather than Israel's need for military security that dictated the settlers' actions. By 1977, they had established almost 80 settlements in the occupied territories, home to around 11,000 inhabitants; in East Jerusalem and its new districts there were another 40,000.²⁴ After 1977, the number of settlers grew to 42,000 in 1985 and to 76,000 in 1990, as illustrated in a table produced by Robert A. Pape. By 2002, the figure was 226,000.²⁵ Martial law in the occupied territories enabled the expropriation of properties, confiscation of uninhabited land, and construction of Jewish settlements and roads featuring Israeli checkpoints.

One consequence of these settlement activities was conflict with the Palestinians living in these territories. Israeli scholar Ehud Sprinzak counted 3,000 cases of communal conflicts between settlers and Arabs from 1981 to the beginning of the First Intifada in 1987.²⁶ These included bomb attacks on the mayors of two Arab cities in revenge for a Palestinian attack on the Talmudic school of Beit Hadassah in Hebron that cost the lives of six Jewish students. In 1983, settlers attacked an Islamic seminary in Hebron, killing a number of students. Both these acts of violence were approved by rabbis. Following the two Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995, the settlers' shock and resentment grew. It first found expression in a massacre carried out in 1994 by a doctor, Baruch Goldstein, originally from the USA, in the burial chamber of Machpela at Hebron, during which he was killed by incensed Muslims.²⁷ Goldstein's funeral was attended by

²² See Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 110–24; in addition, on the principles, see Jamie Rosenman, 'The Apocalyptic Ideology of Gush Emunim', 2004. Internet publication.

²³ See Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*, p. 206.

²⁴ Figures from Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*, p. 358.

²⁵ See Robert A. Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, New York, Random House, 2005, p. 49. The table is based on official Israeli data. East Jerusalem is not included.

²⁶ See Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, p. 148.

²⁷ For analyses of these events and of the heroization of the perpetrator, see Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley,

more than a thousand settlers; his grave became a place of remembrance; friends erected a gravestone with an inscription hailing him as a saint and martyr:

Here lies the saint, Dr. Baruch Kappel Goldstein, blessed be the memory of the righteous and holy man, may the Lord avenge his blood, who devoted his soul to the Jews, Jewish religion and Jewish land. His hands are innocent and his heart is pure. He was killed as a martyr of God on the 14th of Adar, Purim, in the year 5754.²⁸

The use of violence was central rather than marginal to the settlers' movement, concluded Ehud Sprinzak in a study of the subject.²⁹

Another factor contributed to the aggravation of the conflict with the Palestinians. The protocol to the Geneva Convention that acknowledged that combatant members of Palestinian liberation organizations also had a right to protection inspired a furious backlash. In 1979 and 1983, Benjamin Netanyahu, later prime minister of Israel, organized two conferences on terrorism for the Jonathan Institute, one in Jerusalem and one in Washington. Benjamin Netanyahu's brother Jonathan, after whom the Institute was named, was the officer in charge of freeing the Jewish hostages at Entebbe airport in Uganda in 1976, an event during which he lost his life. Both conferences had the declared aim of mobilizing the West to fight against terrorism and rejected 'absolutely the notion that "one's man terrorist is another man's freedom fighter"'.³⁰ The Western media had rashly taken the reasons for their actions from the terrorists themselves and presented them as resistance fighters, wrote Netanyahu. 'This is precisely what the terrorists would like us to believe.' In reality, he asserted, they mutilated and murdered innocents intentionally and with full awareness of what they were doing. The 1979 conference in Jerusalem therefore came up with a different definition of terrorism: 'Terrorism is the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming, and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends'.³¹ On this view, terrorists have

University of California Press, 2000, pp. 49–59; and Ehud Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother: Violence and Extremism in Israeli Politics from Altalena to the Rabin Assassination*, New York, Free Press, 1999, pp. 1–4; 238–43; 258–66.

²⁸ Source: http://www.fact-index.com/b/ba/baruch_goldstein.html.

²⁹ See Ehud Sprinzak, 'From Messianic Pioneering to Vigilante Terrorism', in David C. Rapoport (ed.), *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 194–216, esp. p. 213.

³⁰ Benjamin Netanyahu (ed.), *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, New York, Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1986, p. 3.

³¹ Netanyahu (ed.), *Terrorism*, pp. 8–9.

no right to call themselves resistance fighters or guerrillas, because they attack weak and helpless civilians. The battle against terrorism can be won only if the public and media in the West relinquish their misconceptions. This removed the air of ambivalence surrounding Palestinian combatants, the sense that they were fighting for a legitimate cause with reprehensible means. The good and the bad, the chosen and the depraved, now faced one another across a clear dividing line.

Among the Israelis themselves existing differences of opinion about how to resolve the conflict were also aggravated. The geothology of Gush Emunim endowed the imperative of settling the 'Land of Israel' with a value overriding all other values, one which demonstrated that one truly was one of the people of Israel and showed true faith in the Torah. This view, which did not go uncontested (even by some devotees),³² justified a willingness among convinced settlers to use violence even against fellow Jews. This was aroused above all at times when the government of Israel yielded to international pressure and returned biblical territories. For many settlers, exchanging 'land for peace' was tantamount to apostasy. When the second Oslo Accord of 1995 extended Palestinian autonomy to a further seven towns and hundreds of villages, the association of rabbis in the occupied territories sounded the alarm. To vote to return the land – including military installations – was equivalent to declaring your brother to be a thief. A rabbinical tradition was circulated: anyone who 'delivered' (*moser*) Jews to this fate or 'persecuted' (*rodef*) them must be killed if necessary.³³ A group of activists gathered before the residence of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and carried out the most terrible ritual of damnation known to Judaism: *pulsa di nura* (Aramaic, literally 'flame of the fire').³⁴ A Talmudic

³² Sprinzak describes such a controversy in *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, pp. 153–55. Rabbi Yehuda Amital, graduate of Kook's Talmudic school, accused Gush Emunim of overstating the importance of 'land' at the expense of 'people' and 'Torah' within the process of salvation.

³³ Ronald C. Kiener has compared this type of assassination with that of Anwar al-Sadat: 'Gushist and Qutbian Approaches to Government: A Comparative Analysis of Religious Assassination', *Numen*, 44 (1997), pp. 229–41.

³⁴ See Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother*, pp. 274ff. In October 2004, when Ariel Sharon announced his plan to withdraw from Gaza, the Middle East Web Log reported: 'One rabbi offered to conduct a medieval Pulsa Di Nura ceremony on PM Ariel Sharon, to cause his demise by magic means. Security experts including GSS (Shabak) chiefs, warn that we are only one step away from an actual planned assassination attempt, and perhaps worse, that there are Jewish groups planning to destroy the mosques on the Temple Mount in order to bring about the last messianic war and the establishment of the Third Temple'. <http://www.mideastweb.org/log/archives/00000305.htm>.

student at Bar Ilan University, Yigal Amir, considered himself authorized by rabbinical statements to take action and murdered the prime minister in 1995 during a peace rally.³⁵

Over a twenty-year period, the essence of the Middle East conflict had changed: from a territorial conflict between the state of Israel on the one hand and the states of Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan on the other, it had become a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians over the legitimacy of their religiously grounded claims to the land and hence also a conflict *between Palestinians and Israelis*.

Agitating for the land of Palestine as Islamic endowment (*waqf*)

We find competing framings of the conflict among the Palestinians. On one side stood the Palestinian Liberation Organization, founded in 1964, which claimed to act on behalf of all Palestinians regardless of their religious affiliation, that is, including Arab Christians. When the PLO adopted a charter in 1968, it justified resistance in terms of the struggle of the Arab peoples against imperialism.³⁶ An independent Arab Palestine was to be established, and would be achieved through the solidarity of all Arab states; Arab unity and Palestinian liberation went hand in hand. Zionism was considered a regional variety of imperialism. The partition of Palestine by the UN in 1947 and the foundation of Israel were unlawful; in reality, the Jews were a religion, not a nation. The aim must be to liquidate the Zionist presence, in other words the state of Israel (Article 15).

On the other side stood the Muslim Brothers, who framed the conflict with Israel differently. In view of the decline which Islam had undergone since the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, they believed that the time for armed struggle against the state of Israel had not yet come. Islamization of Arab society must take precedence over anti-imperialist armed struggle. For years, the Muslim Brothers pursued the idea of gradually building an Islamic order. The government of Israel left them alone because it saw them as a welcome counterweight to the PLO. The driving force of the Islamization of Gaza in the 1970s was Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, who had risen to the status of dominant

³⁵ See Sprinzak, *Brother against Brother*, ch. 8: 'To Kill a Prime Minister' (pp. 244–85).

³⁶ English text, 'The Palestinian National Charter', in Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 6th revised edn, 2001, pp. 117–21.

spiritual leader among the Muslim Brothers.³⁷ In 1973, he founded the Islamic Centre (*Mujamma' al-Islami*) as a bulwark against the unbelievers; Israel officially recognized the institution in 1979. The obligation to engage in *jihad*, to 'strive' for the establishment of an Islamic order, did not only consist in a readiness to carry out warlike acts; doing one's best to promote justice and the common good (*maslaha*) of the community was of equal importance. Driven by an ethic of brotherliness, Muslims created social institutions and networks. By the mid-1980s, the Centre had developed into the most powerful institution in Gaza, featuring mosques, libraries, nursery schools, businesses, schools, clinics and a university. Responsibility for this social work required that the Muslim Brothers be circumspect about conflicts with Israel's military power; hence their restraint with respect to direct armed struggle as practised by the PLO and demanded by others.

Following the devastating military defeats suffered by the Arab states in 1967 and the associated loss of respect suffered by Arab nationalism, the PLO also lost credibility. Palestinians increasingly sought in Islam the strength needed to cope with the two 'catastrophes' (*al-nakba*) – the partition of Palestine in 1948 and the occupation of the Palestinian territories by Israel in 1967.³⁸ In the late 1970s, when the Revolution in Iran shook the Islamic world, a new generation of Palestinian Muslims rejected the official line of the Muslim Brothers that the time for an uprising against Israel was not yet ripe. They were no longer prepared to accept the catch-22 of embracing either secular political activism or Islamic quietism. Islamic traditions and role models would now serve to interpret the situation of the Muslims in Palestine and as a guide to revolutionary action. This ushered in a period of vigorous development for Palestinian Islamist groups.³⁹

This was the state of play in 1987. In association with the First Palestinian Intifada, a well-matched revolutionary religious competitor rose to challenge

³⁷ His father was a farmer in the Gaza Strip who became a refugee as a result of the war of 1948. Ahmad Yasin, born in 1936, grew up in a mosque run by the Islamic Brotherhood. At the age of sixteen, he broke his neck while playing and was almost entirely paralysed from then on. On the life and work of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, see Ziad Abu-Amr, 'Shaykh Ahmad Yasin and the Origins of Hamas', in Appleby (ed.), *Spokesmen for the Despised*, pp. 225–56.

³⁸ See Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 90 and 106; on the two 'catastrophes', see the website <http://www.alnakba.org>.

³⁹ See Reuven Paz, 'The Development of Palestinian Islamic Groups', in Barry Rubin (ed.), *Revolutionaries and Reformers: Contemporary Islamist Movements in the Middle East*, New York, SUNY Press, 2003, pp. 23–40. The text is also available online.

the PLO. The uprising was triggered on 6 December 1987 by an accident which Palestinians interpreted as deliberate revenge for the death of a Jewish businessman in the Gaza Strip. Yet this was merely the apparent reason. The uprising had been preceded by a series of clashes between Palestinians and settlers, whose numbers had steadily risen. Palestinians protested against martial law in the occupied territories and its negative consequences with campaigns of civil disobedience such as the flying of Palestinian flags, shouting Palestinian slogans, burning tyres at road junctions, throwing stones at the cars of Jewish settlers, closing shops without authorization and various other measures. The response of the Israeli army was severe and bloody. To coordinate these spontaneous disturbances, the PLO appointed a supreme command. The head of the Islamic Centre in Gaza, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, seized the initiative and consulted with the key members of the Centre, including Dr Abdul Rantisi. The group decided not to leave coordination of the uprising to the PLO and its United National Command and to found their own organization. It was to be called the Islamic Resistance Movement (*harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya*), whose contracted form *hamas* also means 'zeal' in Arabic.⁴⁰ The foundation of Hamas as a distinct organization within the Brotherhood was also intended to protect the network of the Muslim Brothers in the Gaza Strip from direct confrontation with Israel and its armed forces. If these institutions or their representatives were attacked by Israel, the organization responded with deadly violence.

On the Palestinian side, the conflict was initially carried on with the tools of civil disobedience and the leaflets of the UNC only gradually called on the people to use violence; Hamas, though, considered violence a component of the conflict from the beginning.⁴¹ Those shot dead by the Israeli army were martyrs on the divine path, as an early communiqué of 14 December 1987 put it.⁴² Their

⁴⁰ The history of Hamas has been appraised by Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, Washington, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000; and by Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000.

⁴¹ A selection of communiqués by the UNC and Hamas during the first few years of the First Intifada has been published by Shaul Mishal and Reuben Aharoni, *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 1994. In the chapter 'Paper War: The Intifada Leaflets', the authors examine this literary genre and compare the contents of both organizations' leaflets (pp. 25–49); a comparison of the two camps with respect to calls for violence is found on pp. 39–42. This is preceded by the chapter 'The Road to the Intifada' (pp. 1–23), in which the authors deal with the growing importance of young people to the social institutions in the West Bank, pointing to the Israeli policy of occupation as an explanation (pp. 18–21).

⁴² English translation in the appendix of Hroub, *Hamas*, pp. 265ff.

death was an expression of the spirit of self-sacrifice of the Palestinians, who loved the eternal life more than their enemies did the earthly. A people with no fear of death cannot die. On this view, the uprising represents a rejection of the occupation and its pressures, of land confiscation and the creation of settlements, of the Zionist policy of subjugation. It also awakens the conscience of those left gasping after what were viewed as a sick peace, empty international conferences and treasonous partial agreements such as Camp David. The Intifada shows that Islam is the solution and the alternative. The Jewish settlers would be left in no doubt: the Palestinian people know the path of sacrifice and martyrdom and are very generous in this respect. 66 acts of violence against Israelis in the first three years of the Intifada, often carried out with knives, showed how serious this threat was.⁴³

In August of the following year, 1988, Hamas published its charter, its manifesto, putting forward a consistently Islamic interpretation of the uprising.⁴⁴ It was a wing of the Muslim Brothers (Article 2) and wished to raise the banner of God over every corner of Palestine (Article 6). The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic land entrusted to the Muslim generations until Judgement Day. Following the conquest, the Caliph had decided that this land should remain in the hands of its inhabitants, but that its revenue must be used for the public welfare for ever more (Article 11). With this interpretation, Hamas took up a concept that attained its contemporary meaning only in the twentieth century, through the process of coming to terms with Zionism.⁴⁵ The institution of the *waqf* as such, it is true, dates back to the time of the Prophet. He advised a comrade-in-arms to transfer conquered territories to the needy as alms, thus making it impossible to sell them. But the application of this notion to Palestine as a whole is of more recent vintage. In the 1930s, Islamic scholars spoke out against the sale of Palestinian land to Jews, until the Mufti of Palestine, Amin al-Husaini, finally claimed Palestine as property entrusted (*amana*) to the Muslims in a fatwa in 1935, condemning

⁴³ These figures are taken from Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, p. 57 and n. 6 on p. 209.

⁴⁴ English translation in the appendix of Hroub, *Hamas*, pp. 267–91; excerpts in German in Andreas Meier, *Der politische Auftrag des Islam. Programme und Kritik zwischen Fundamentalismus und Reform. Originalstimmen aus der islamischen Welt*, Wuppertal, Hammer, 1994, pp. 384–93.

⁴⁵ See Krämer, *A History of Palestine*, pp. 249–54; on the legal institution of the *waqf*, see Jan-Peter Hartung, 'Die fromme Stiftung [*waqf*]. Eine islamische Analogie zur Körperschaft', in Hans G. Kippenberg and Gunnar Folke Schuppert (eds.), *Die verrechtlichte Religion. Der Öffentlichkeitsstatus von Religionsgemeinschaften*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2005, pp. 287–314, esp. pp. 298–303.

those who sold land as apostates. In analogy to the Jewish idea of the 'salvation' of the land, Muslims too called for it to be 'saved'.

By incorporating an old Islamic legal institution into the interpretation of the situation, Palestinian nationalism was anchored in Islam. 'Nationalism (*wataniya*) [...] is part and parcel of religious ideology', the charter continues in Article 12. The struggle against the occupation is the fulfilment of an old commandment. There could be no peaceful solutions. 'There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except through jihad' (Article 13). 'When an enemy usurps a Muslim land, then the jihad is an individual duty on every Muslim' (Article 15). The justification for interpreting the land as *waqf* added a social dimension to nationalism. The movement prided itself on promoting social solidarity and looking after the needy. Islamic society is a cooperative society (Articles 20 and 21). Hamas valued and respected other Islamic movements, as everyone has the right to interpret Islam in his own way (*ijtihad*) (Article 23). The PLO was a close companion, but had made the mistake of adopting the idea of the secular state, which was inconsistent with religion and must be rejected. 'The Islamic nature of the Palestine issue is part and parcel of our religion.' If the PLO were to adopt Islam as its programme, Hamas would be the fuel for its fire – the charter thus impressed upon the Palestinians that their land would be liberated only by creating an Islamic order.⁴⁶

Suicide bombings/martyr operations

In 1991, Hamas created a brigade whose task was to engage in armed struggle and which was to lead this struggle against Israel in a calculated way. The phased model of the brotherhood was realized and modified through the founding of a distinct organization. This armed wing was named after Izz al-Din al-Qassem and thus continued a tradition which began in the 1930s. As a member of the Egyptian brotherhood and imam of an old-town Jerusalem mosque, Izz al-Din al-Qassem combined reformist sermons with social engagement and called on young Muslims to return to the Islamic order and take up armed struggle against the British and the Jews. With the slogan 'This is jihad, victory or martyrdom [*istishhad*]', he established under his command a force of several hundred voluntary fighters (*fida'iyyin*) to engage in armed struggle against the infidels. He died in 1935 during a clash with a British patrol. As a martyr, his memory lived on.⁴⁷ During the First Intifada,

⁴⁶ On patriotism within Palestinian Islamism, see Jean-François Legrain, 'Palestinian Islamisms: Patriotism as a Condition of their Expansion', in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994, pp. 413–27.

⁴⁷ See Krämer, *A History of Palestine*, pp. 259–63.

it was not only the leaflets distributed by Hamas that invoked him, but those of the UNC as well.⁴⁸

The brigade achieved notoriety chiefly because of its suicide attacks. These were inspired by experiences in Lebanon. Israel unintentionally helped pass on these experiences in 1992 when it expelled hundreds of Islamists from the occupied territories, among them Abdul Rantisi; Lebanon refused them entry. They were stranded in no-man's-land for months, where they were looked after by members of Hezbollah, who, among other things, helped them to appreciate the special advantages of suicide attacks. Years later, in conversation with Mark Juergensmeyer, Abdul Rantisi explained that initially Hamas's military operations were targeted solely at soldiers in the occupied territories. This changed only when the Israeli police bloodily dispersed a demonstration by Palestinians before the al-Aqsa mosque on Temple Mount in 1990 and the Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein massacred Muslims in the Cave of the Patriarchs at Hebron in 1994. Only then were civilians in Israel attacked.⁴⁹ This assertion is amenable to verification.

Robert A. Pape has classified all suicide attacks worldwide by date, type of weapon, aim, number of dead and campaigns.⁵⁰ The list itself shows that suicide attacks are not specifically Islamic. They occur in territories occupied by democratic states and in places where the people are too weak to resist militarily. Hence, we should not blame their spread in the Middle East on an inherently violent Islam; they are linked with the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. On the surface, these acts look like acts of individuals. In fact, though, a suicide attack is not the work of an individual, but requires a team, which justifies the act, determines the goal and instructs the perpetrator. The latter is usually not an uneducated believer, but is often a member of the educated middle class, and by no means particularly easy to manipulate. The more one learns about the sequence of events and the profile of the perpetrators, the clearer it becomes that what we are seeing here is a selfless death to the benefit of a community – an altruistic suicide, to use Emile Durkheim's conception, or an act of violence rooted in an ethics of conviction, in Max Weber's sense.

Hamas's first campaign took place on 6 and 13 April 1994. Forty days had

⁴⁸ See Mishal and Aharoni, *Speaking Stones*, p. 33: leaflet no. 2 by the UNC and leaflet no. 31 by Hamas.

⁴⁹ See Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, pp. 69–78 ('Abdul Aziz Rantisi and Hamas Suicide Missions').

⁵⁰ See Pape, *Dying to Win*, Appendix II, 'Suicide Terrorist Campaigns, 1980–2003', p. 263; the phenomenon is dealt with in a similar way by Ami Pedahzur, *Suicide Terrorism*, Cambridge, Polity, 2005, pp. 241–53, Appendix, 'Suicide Bombings (December 1981–June 2005)'. I am unable to go into the differences between the two here.

passed since the massacre by Baruch Goldstein in the Cave of the Patriarchs, when a suicide attack, resulting in deaths and injuries, was carried out on a school bus in the city of Afula (northern Israel) – tying in with the usual commemoration of a martyr forty days after his death. A week later, a bus in Hadara in Israel was the target of an attack, and again there were a number of deaths and many injuries. Another campaign by Hamas and Islamic Jihad followed from October 1994 to August 1995.⁵¹ During the Second Intifada from 2000, when Ariel Sharon demonstratively desecrated the Islamic sites on Temple Mount, another campaign of suicide attacks began. It struck Israeli civilians in Israel and triggered retaliatory measures by Israel. The suicide attack as a technique had now crossed the boundary with the nationalists. The PLO established its own al-Aqsa Brigade, which operated in the same way.⁵² Here, we must bear in mind opinion polls among Palestinians. They show growing approval of this kind of fighting as a response to Israeli repression: from 29 per cent in 1995 to 73 per cent in 2001 and 61 per cent in 2003.⁵³

Violence in the *Heilsgeschichte*

The violence of Hamas was embedded in a script shaped by a *Heilsgeschichte*. The charter invoked a *hadith*, handed down from the Prophet, relating to the end times:

The Final Hour will not come until Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims kill them, and until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, and a stone or tree would say: O Muslim, servant of God, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him! But the tree of Gharqad would not say it, for it is the tree of the Jews.⁵⁴

David Cook has shown that with the defeats of 1967, a renaissance of apocalyptic ideas began in the Arab world. *Heilsgeschichte* could render comprehensible something which remained a mystery to the normal, rational individual: how puny Israel was able to beat the more powerful Arab states of Egypt, Syria and Jordan militarily and take the endowed land of Palestine from the Muslims. In

⁵¹ See Pape, *Dying to Win*, Appendix II, 'Suicide Terrorist Campaigns, 1980–2003', pp. 253–64.

⁵² The explosion of violence is apparent in the overview by Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 260–62.

⁵³ See Pape, *Dying to Win*, pp. 49–51.

⁵⁴ Hroub, *Hamas*, p. 272; on this tradition, see also Anne Marie Oliver and Paul F. Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square: A Journey into the World of the Suicide Bomber*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 19–24 ('The Gharqad Tree').

the Islamic conception of eschatological history, the appearance of the Mahdi is preceded by the rule of the Dajjal, the Islamic 'Antichrist'. Only after his destruction will the Mahdi fill the world with justice, as it is now filled with tyranny and injustice.⁵⁵ To this traditional end-times scenario was added the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory of the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. In addition, Islamic theorists of the Apocalypse borrowed from American pre-millenarianism the expectation that the 'Antichrist' would establish his bloody regime of terror in Israel at the end of times.⁵⁶ Graffiti, videos and leaflets produced by Hamas, which Anne Marie Oliver and Paul F. Steinberg have collected and published, presuppose this connection. They demonize the Jews as 'sons of apes and pigs', depict their end in sadistic fashion, revel in the notion of the fear that will grip their hearts at the sight of a 'living' martyr.⁵⁷ The index finger raised to heaven, which stands for the uniqueness of God and his Prophet, is celebrated as the finger pulling the trigger of a machine gun.⁵⁸ A single drop of blood shed by a Muslim secures his redemption and his place in paradise. A martyr's funeral is really his wedding.⁵⁹

These attacks represent a serious violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. A leaflet produced by the American organization Human Rights Watch on this topic recapitulates the legal regulations in armed conflicts and condemns suicide attacks on civilians as crimes against humanity and war crimes.⁶⁰

American pre-millenarianism and Israel

The transition to war between religious communities has also affected the USA. It is particularly disastrous that efforts to establish links with the Bible have had an impact, especially on its foreign policy. The idea of *eretz Yisrael* mobilizes understanding and loyalty, the word *waqf* nothing but irritated responses. The precedence given to Israel's claims over those of the Palestinians and the exorbitant military and financial aid with which the USA furnishes the state

⁵⁵ For a recent study of the apocalyptic traditions in Islamic history, see David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic*, Princeton, Darwin, 2002; on the Dajjal, pp. 93–120.

⁵⁶ See David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature*, Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press, 2005, pp. 13–58 ('Building a New Vision of the Future in the Wake of the Six Days' War').

⁵⁷ See Oliver and Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square*, pp. 76–80.

⁵⁸ See Oliver and Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ See Oliver and Steinberg, *The Road to Martyrs' Square*, pp. 72–76.

⁶⁰ *Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks against Israeli Civilians*, New York, Human Rights Watch, 2002, pp. 43–61.

of Israel can hardly be put down solely to the influence of a Jewish lobby;⁶¹ their roots also lie in the view of history characteristic of a particular strand of Protestantism, which has become a significant force in American society. It dates back to the nineteenth century, when countless Jews were forced to flee from Russia. Even before the First Zionist Congress of 1897, American Protestants petitioned their president to allow the displaced Jews to return to their homeland of Palestine.⁶² The reason for their engagement was a specific eschatological scenario.⁶³ They did not believe that the biblical promises to the people of Israel had been transferred to Christians and thus to the Church, a widely held view in Christian theology, but rather that they continue to apply to the Jewish people. In accordance with the still unfulfilled prophecies, the process of restoring Israel had begun in the present age; the final millennium would soon commence. A particularly striking feature of this theology, invented by John Nelson Darby (1800–82), was the doctrine of the rapture of the righteous. Before the time of suffering begins, the chosen or the ‘Church’ will be delivered to the Lord (1 Thess. 4:17), thus escaping the horrors of the end of history. This view of history is therefore also known as pre-millenarianism. After the rapture, seven years of tribulation will begin for all those left behind (Mt. 24:21). During this time, the Antichrist, based in Jerusalem, will unleash a reign of terror over the world. The Jews, who have returned to Palestine, will reach an agreement with him to rebuild the Temple. Finally, though, the Antichrist, together with the heathens and the Jews, unless they embrace Jesus, will be wiped out in the battle of Armageddon in Palestine. In this process, God has given the USA a similar role to that played by the Persian king Cyrus, who helped the Jews return from their Babylonian exile to Palestine and was thus described as ‘anointed by the Lord’ by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 45:1).

As increasing numbers of Jews moved to Israel over the course of the twentieth century, this process in turn had an impact on the pre-millenarian Protestants’ attitude to politics: ‘For the first time [they] believed that it was necessary to leave the bleachers and get onto the playing field to make sure the game ended according to the divine script’.⁶⁴ Protestants were no longer content to play the role of onlookers; they sought active involvement. Before their (inner)

⁶¹ See the controversial article by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Watt, ‘The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy’, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/no6/print/mearo1.html>.

⁶² On this petition, see Yaakov Ariel, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes towards Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865–1945*, New York, Carlson, 1991, pp. 70–72.

⁶³ For an account of this theological current and its relationship to Israel, see Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academy, 2004.

⁶⁴ Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, p. 15.

eyes, the *Heilsgeschichte* played itself out: from the Balfour Declaration of 1917 through the proclamation of the state of Israel on 14 May 1948, the Suez war of 1956 and the Six Days' War of 1967 to the occupation of the old town of Jerusalem by the Israeli army on 8 June 1967 and the occupation of the West Bank. As one of the next steps, these American Protestants expect the restoration of the Jewish Temple. Some of them openly affirm that the Islamic Dome of the Rock would have to be destroyed first.⁶⁵

This conception of history has had an impact far beyond religious communities. Hal Lindsey helped popularize the end-times scenario with his 1970 book *The Late Great Planet Earth*.⁶⁶ The final era of the fulfilment of the biblical end-times prophecies was fast approaching. A sure sign of this was the restoration of Israel in the Holy Land in 1948. The theatre of war was being made ready. The time had come of which Jesus said:

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (Mt. 24:32–34)

Now that Israel had been restored, the seven-year age of tribulation would begin within no more than one generation, in other words by 1988 at the latest.⁶⁷

The war of 1967 and the annexation of the old town of Jerusalem to the state of Israel created the conditions for the rebuilding of the Temple.⁶⁸ The geopolitical alliances which clash in the Battle of Armageddon are, according to Lindsey, already discernible (chapters 5–9). The threats to Israel from the Soviet Union in the north and Egypt in the south and the return of the Roman Empire in the shape of the European Community are part and parcel of the last days of humankind. Next, the followers of Christ would be removed from the Earth. Eye-witness accounts illustrate how we are to imagine this process. For example: as I was driving along the motorway, there was sudden pandemonium; cars were zigzagging around because the drivers had been transported to heaven. There are further brief accounts of how people are suddenly removed while going

⁶⁵ See Gershom Gorenberg, *The End of Days: Fundamentalism and the Struggle for the Temple Mount*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

⁶⁶ Hal Lindsey with Carole C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Grand Rapids, MI, Zondervan, 1970.

⁶⁷ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, pp. 53ff. (interpretation of the parable of the fig tree).

⁶⁸ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, pp. 54–57.

about their work and the world then descends into chaos.⁶⁹ The rapture of the righteous is followed by the period of great suffering for those left behind. The Antichrist promises to give the world peace, and Israel makes a pact with him: 'It is through an ingenious settlement of the Middle East problem that the Antichrist will make good his promise to bring peace to a world terrified of war'.⁷⁰ After this, though, the Lord arrives (Lindsey's chapters 11–13). A nuclear Armageddon destroys this world; Jesus Christ establishes the Kingdom of God.

When the fundamentalist or evangelical current which propagated this view of history took on a political form as the 'Moral Majority' and coalesced around the Republican Ronald Reagan towards the end of the 1970s, Hal Lindsey produced another book: *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*.⁷¹ Here he furnishes us with a gloomy account of the three possible fates of the USA: a Communist takeover, preceded by a surprise nuclear strike by the Soviet Union, or dependency on the ten states of the European Community. Yet he sees a glimmer of hope: the USA can be saved by a political programme which curbs the welfare state and bureaucracy, rejects the SALT treaties and turns America into a military superpower. What was in reality Reagan's election manifesto became a means of proving one's faith in the battle against the forces of the Antichrist. When the Soviet Union was no more, Lindsey wrote a new book, *The Magog Factor*, but the apocalyptic drama featured a new villain. Now it was Islamists who took on the role of the Antichrist and his followers.⁷²

Hal Lindsey's success with *The Late Great Planet Earth* beggars belief. 35 million copies had been sold by 1990.⁷³ This book did more than any other to popularize the pre-millenarian conception of history.⁷⁴ Yet even this success was to be surpassed by a series of novels written by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, entitled *Left Behind*. Tim LaHaye, born in 1926, was a graduate of Bob Jones University and founding member of the Moral Majority. He too maintains the doctrine of the rapture before the beginning of the time of tribulation. Intent on popularizing this end-times scenario through the novel, he found a gifted co-author in the shape of Jerry Jenkins. The first novel, *Left Behind: A Novel of the*

⁶⁹ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, pp. 136ff.

⁷⁰ Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, p. 152.

⁷¹ Hal Lindsey, *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*, New York, Bantam, 1981.

⁷² See Stephen D. O'Leary, *Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 172–93 ('Apocalyptic Politics in the New Christian Right').

⁷³ See Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, p. 191.

⁷⁴ Paul S. Boyer has produced a comprehensive account of the popularity of the pre-millenarian current in the USA: *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992.

Earth's Last Days, appeared in 1995; the latest, *Kingdom Come: The Final Victory* in April 2007. The series is not only found in religious bookshops, but has also sold in vast quantities in Barnes and Noble, Borders and Wal-Mart. With an estimated 60 million copies sold, it has far surpassed Hal Lindsey's book. The publisher, Tyndale House, disseminated the series still further by creating other product lines such as comics, audio cassettes, websites, videos and DVDs.⁷⁵

The story is based on a small theological revision of the notion of the rapture with significant dramatic potential. While Darby's work leaves those left behind with no prospect of evading their fate, this series opens up the possibility that they might yet escape damnation by converting. This modification gives rise to the series' basic plot, which drives the action in every scene.⁷⁶ The left behind can still prove their faith – the men, of course, primarily through heroic and courageous struggle against the Antichrist and his soldiers. At the centre of the action is flight captain Rayford Steele, who is piloting his Boeing 747 from Chicago O'Hare to London Heathrow when passengers and cabin staff suddenly make the terrible discovery that dozens of passengers have disappeared. All that remains on their empty seats is their articles of clothing and jewellery. Steele is ordered back to O'Hare, where he finds a world in chaos. Aircraft without pilots have crashed the world over. Arriving home, he finds his house and marital bed empty. His wife, a born-again Christian, has also been transported. Rayford Steele bands together with others to form the 'Tribulation Force' to counter the forces of evil. They enter into battle with Nicolae Carpathia, the UN secretary general, who is really the Antichrist. His peace treaties with Israel are merely intended to secure his dominion. For the sake of truth, there can and must be no peace, only violence, during the seven years of his reign. In this period, the left behind still have one final chance to prove themselves and become combatants in the drama of the end times.

This plot rouses readers' imagination and imparts a view of history and model of action: it is the faithful rather than any political institutions that represent the true America; the United Nations is an instrument of the Antichrist. The more time goes by, the faster the moral, religious, military and economic decline. Promises of peace, disarmament, environmental protection and international

⁷⁵ For information on the series, see Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon*, pp. 192–96; Bruce David Forbes and Jeanne Halgren Kilde (eds.), *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; here, see 'How Popular Are the Left Behind Books ... and Why?' by Bruce David Forbes on pp. 5–32. The figure of 60 million copies sold is on p. 7.

⁷⁶ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, 'How Did Left Behind's Particular Vision of the End Times Develop? A Historical Look at Millenarian Thought', in Forbes and Kilde (eds.), *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times*, pp. 33–70, esp. p. 60.

treaties are the work of the Antichrist.⁷⁷ The success of this series brings to light something which otherwise tends to remain hidden: a religious subculture that is entering the political mainstream; the matrix of an American popular culture that is creating specific views of history and politics. These are pervaded by a Manichaean structure. Evil is not something that comes from our world, but from beyond it. People are not both good *and* evil; they are *either* good *or* evil. The solution to the existence of evil is not meekly to tolerate it, but to destroy it by force; the good guys win in the end.⁷⁸ This basic structure, also familiar from Hollywood films, comics and science fiction, has a lengthy history in the USA.⁷⁹ The popular fascination with this type of masculine violence is taken up by *Left Behind* and turned to religious ends. The idealization of violence is transformed from 'religious half-product' to the content of subjective religiosity.⁸⁰ Today, forty to fifty million Americans sympathize with such an end-times scenario and make up a huge block of potential voters, mobilized by the Republicans under Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

The linkage of religious history and foreign policy in the New Christian Right is not a direct one, but may be particularly effective for that very reason. The effect exercised by pre-millenarianism on US politics consists of a religious aggravation of political differences. A quotation from a televangelist, cited by Grace Halsell is a typical example: 'There'll be no peace until Jesus comes. Any preaching of peace prior to this return is heresy; it's against the word of God; it's Antichrist'.⁸¹

The semantics of the terms 'freedom fighter'/'terrorist'

George P. Shultz, American secretary of state from 1983 to 1989, took part in the second conference of the Jonathan Institute and adopted the new definition of terrorists. Terrorists are enemies of democracy. Their violence does not serve the

⁷⁷ See Amy Johnson Frykholm, *Rapture Culture: Left Behind in Evangelical America*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; idem, 'What Social and Political Messages Appear in the Left Behind Books? A Literary Discussion of Millenarian Fiction', in Forbes and Kilde (eds.), *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times*, pp. 167–95.

⁷⁸ Forbes, 'How Popular Are the Left Behind Books?', pp. 22–29.

⁷⁹ See Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism*, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2003.

⁸⁰ The concept of the 'religious half-product' comes from Georg Simmel and his book *Sociology of Religion*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1959 (1922).

⁸¹ Grace Halsell, *Prophecy and Politics: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War*, Westport, CT, Lawrence, 1986, p. 16. See also Forbes' remark in 'How Popular Are the Left Behind Books?', p. 28.

goal of winning over others to a just cause; they act out of hate for civilization. If you have understood this, Shultz stated in 1983, it is not difficult to distinguish between terrorists and freedom fighters. Those fighting in Afghanistan or the Contras in Nicaragua for example do not kill innocents and are therefore genuine resistance fighters rather than terrorists.

This formation of a new concept shows in exemplary fashion how, through the act of speaking, a term is infused with judgements, giving rise to a semantics which is in turn capable of legitimizing actions. Following Tomis Kapitan, I would describe this semantics as follows:⁸² those who refer to terrorists remove from their listeners any desire to learn something about the reasons for the actions of those thus designated; they divert attention away from the question of whether one's own policies may possibly have contributed to the development of such phenomena; they imply that it is absurd to negotiate with such people.

The term 'terrorists' confronts us with a metaphysical concept which separates an act of violence from any kind of understandable explanation, leaving the elimination of the perpetrators as the only adequate solution to the problem. Terrorists are moral nihilists and stand outside the legal order. They must be annihilated through war. The US State Department draws up an annual list of terrorist organizations. If we turn from this semantics to how it is applied, inconsistencies emerge. Let us return to George P. Shultz's assertion that it is crystal-clear who is the resistance fighter and who the terrorist and his two examples. The Contras, supported by the USA, killed around 3,000 civilians in Nicaragua in the 1980s, to say nothing of the atrocities of the anti-Soviet fighters in Afghanistan. In retrospect, it is apparent not only that both examples were unfortunate choices, but that the rhetoric of 'terrorism' is dominated by the political friend/enemy schema. At the moment of its application, the term automatically becomes identical with one's political enemies. A recent example illustrates this point. After invading Iraq, the USA agreed a truce with an Iranian opposition group, the Mujahedin-e Khalk, which had for years been readying itself for the violent overthrow of the Iranian regime; they were allowed to hold onto their weapons so that they could use them against possible invaders from Iran. In order to do so, however, the group had first to be removed from the State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations. Daniel Pipes, who reports these events in a newspaper article entitled 'A Terrorist U.S. Ally?', concludes that there could be no objection to this. The group no longer represented a threat to the security of the United States.⁸³

⁸² See Tomis Kapitan, 'The Terrorism of "Terrorism"', in James Sterba (ed.), *Terrorism and International Justice*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 47–66.

⁸³ See Daniel Pipes and Patrick Clawson, 'A Terrorist U.S. Ally?', *New York Post*, 20 May 2003.

Let us return to the issue of the definition of terrorism. In 1983, the same year that the conferences of the Jonathan Institute took place, the US State Department committed itself to a definition of terrorism: ‘The term “terrorism” means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant* targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience’.⁸⁴ This definition brands every kind of violence practised by non-state groups against non-military targets as terrorism – regardless of whether or not it is an act of resistance against an occupation. The asterisk is particularly worthy of note. We are informed that ‘civilians’ includes military personnel who are not on duty at the time.

When President George W. Bush declared war on terror, he signed an internal memorandum in February 2002:

Subject: Humane Treatment of al Qaeda and Taliban Detainees.

The Commander in Chief and Chief Executive of the United States determines as follows: ‘... none of the provisions of Geneva apply to our conflict with al Qaeda in Afghanistan or elsewhere throughout the world because, among other reasons, al Qaeda is not a High Contracting Party to Geneva’.

Of course, the memorandum goes on, our values require us to treat humanely even those detainees who are not legally entitled to such treatment. Subsequently the Commander-in-Chief reaffirmed an order issued by the Secretary of Defense, ‘requiring that the detainees be treated humanely and, to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity, in a manner consistent with the principles of Geneva’.⁸⁵ Without this qualification, the practices in the prison camps of Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib would not have been possible. Seymour M. Hersh has researched debates within the government on torture in Guantánamo. The unanimous view was that not all cruel, inhumane or degrading practices cause sufficient pain and suffering to come under the prohibition on torture. Besides, by virtue of the constitution of the United States, the president has the right to suspend the Geneva Convention with respect to Afghanistan, though he did not at present wish to make use of this right.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ US Department of State, Counterterrorism Office, Releases, Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000, Introduction. <http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pgtrpt/2000/2419.htm>.

⁸⁵ See Mark Danner, *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib, and the War on Terror*, New York, New York Review of Books, 2004, pp. 105–106.

⁸⁶ See Seymour M. Hersh, *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, New York, HarperCollins, 2004, pp. 1–20.

Conclusion: an unfamiliar chapter of contemporary religious history

To look closely at the religious interpretation of the Middle East conflict is to open a new chapter in the religious history of modernity. But we also notice how difficult it has become for us to understand religion; we have become religious illiterates. I would therefore like to conclude by summarizing what we can learn by examining this case.

Historically, the assumption that there can no longer be any belief in a *Heilsgeschichte* in modernity is wrong. Alongside the belief in a progress which human beings could bring about themselves through mastery of nature and social reform, the expectation of a time of salvation at the end of all history has remained in place. There are thus two distinct ways to conceptualize the future. The future may be sketched out from the perspective of the present; this renders it an open space that may be planned and created by human beings. Sketched out from the perspective of the end of time, however, the future may also be understood as a time of salvation in which humanity is delivered from its suffering and all absurdities – here, the future is understood as the fulfilment of the salvation promised to Abraham and his descendants. Both constructions – history as a secular sphere of planned progress, and as the scene for the manifestation of salvation – have remained equally valid.

Actors may still frame a conflict in terms of *Heilsgeschichte* without necessarily being uneducated fanatics. In the case of the Middle East conflict, this has undoubtedly been an aggravating factor. If the settlement of an occupied territory or resistance to it are interpreted in terms of *Heilsgeschichte*, solutions within the framework of international law appear to be impossible. Yet this is not necessarily the case. The ultra-orthodox rejection of the foundation of a Jewish state has not disappeared with the emergence of religious settlers. Even today, ultra-orthodox Jews still live, as they see it, in a double exile: not only in a time without the Messiah, but also in a religiously illegitimate Jewish state. This finds particularly vivid expression in the fact that one member of the delegation of Palestinians with whom the government of Israel carried out negotiations within the framework of the Oslo accords was an ultra-orthodox rabbi. He saw himself as a Jewish Palestinian contributing to the establishment of a non-Jewish state in Palestine. The idea that a Jew cannot force the end to come has remained part of the Jewish tradition and may therefore become binding again at any time. The authority of religious traditions is not inherent in those traditions; it is something that believers endow them with. In the same way, two options are built into the salvation-based interpretation applied to the conflict by Islamists: alongside a warlike ethics of conviction which demands armed struggle for the community there exists an ethics of responsibility which, in light of existing

social institutions and the people dependent on them, calls for the exercise of patience. It is true that there can never be peace with Israel from this perspective; but it is quite possible to imagine a truce. Even interpretations of conflict based on *Heilsgeschichte* do not necessarily end in violence. It is thus incorrect to state that such interpretations always aggravate conflict and are therefore bad. They may equally demand of believers that they 'live with difference', in other words, they expect salvation without changing the present order through violence. The characterization of entire organizations as terrorist regardless of this ambivalence, and the desire to eradicate them, ignores this ambivalence and itself becomes a source of violence.

Religious networks and communities have been spreading dramatically for several decades. The explosive spread of Protestant congregations in Latin America and the Pacific is as worthy of mention here⁸⁷ as the surge in the foundation of mosques in Europe and the USA.⁸⁸ Clearly, globalization is fostering the development of religiously based communities. With the advent of economic and political orders of a rational, modern character, religious communities have become increasingly important – because of their ethic of brotherliness. This is in particular demand in critical situations in which the individual fails to receive, either from neighbours or kin or from the state, sufficient protection and security against growing risks and threats to his or her existence. The ethic of brotherliness may take on various forms in these circumstances. In situations in which its networks were threatened from outside, Hamas has promoted a belligerent ethics of conviction; when the threat diminished, it has demanded an ethics of responsibility. I suspect that all attempts to destroy Hamas (or Hezbollah) are doomed to failure and only ever give rise to new manifestations of belligerence.

In a study of the struggle over Temple Mount,⁸⁹ Gershom Gorenberg has pointed out that politicians are not blameless with respect to the way the Middle East conflict has changed: 'The problem is the ease with which political leaders

⁸⁷ We have British sociologist of religion David Martin to thank for the soundest empirical studies of this subject: David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990; idem, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002 (see also his contribution in the present volume).

⁸⁸ Olivier Roy (*Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004) examines this process from an Islamic Studies perspective. Empirical material must be garnered from studies of individual countries. For Germany, see Ursula Spuler-Stegemann, *Muslimen in Deutschland. Informationen und Klärungen*, Freiburg, Herder, 2002; for Europe, see Grace Davie, *The Sociology of Religion*, Los Angeles, Sage, 2007, p. 168.

⁸⁹ See Gorenberg, *The End of Days*, p. 244.

seek the support of religious figures while discounting the potential impact of their views'.⁹⁰ We must demand consistent policies of our politicians: that they cease to tolerate, in one-sided fashion, Jewish movements that disregard international law and that they discontinue their equally one-sided wars against Islamic networks. The ambivalence of religious communities offers sufficient bases for a policy of de-escalation on both sides. For the sake of peace, we need a state which defends the existing legal order against all religious claims; and we need politicians who deal constructively with the power of religious communities for the common good.

⁹⁰ Gorenberg, *The End of Days*, p. 195.