

The Last Uncomfortable “Religious” Question? Monotheistic Exclusivism and Textual Superiority in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as Sources of Hate and Genocide

Dr. Steven Leonard Jacobs
Aaron Aronov Endowed Chair of Judaic Studies
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
The University of Alabama
sjacobs@bama.ua.edu

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a *preliminary* examination of *some* of the texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Qur’an—that appear to affirm such exclusivism, and, at the same time, a reflection upon the *meanings* and *implications* of those texts coterminous with their historical realities.

The first part of this paper is an examination of *representative* texts from these three great monotheistic traditions which affirm, each in their own way, the exclusivistic nature of their understandings of (1) the singular reality of the God of Israel/Allah as the *Only True Divine Reality* (i.e. the Christ being here understood as an expression/manifestation of that Oneness), and (2) the *self-perceived privileged* nature of the relationship each of these three religious traditions has with and to that Reality.

The second part of this paper is a *reflection* by one trained in reading, analyzing, and understanding classical Jewish texts (i.e. Torah, Midrash, Talmud, etc.), and theological thinking upon the *meanings* and *implications* of such texts as they do or do not reinforce certain potentially hateful and pre-genocidal orientations of these three groups in relation to each other and other groups.

The concluding section of this paper, encompassing the three questions to be shared with those in attendance¹, is one of *praxis*: What, *in concrete terms*, is to be done with such information to bring about a future potentially devoid of hate and where genocide is but a historical memory?

I. INTRODUCTION: A STUDENT’S TROUBLING PAPER

Among the courses I teach at The University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, in

my capacity as the holder of the Aaron Aronov endowed Chair of Judaic Studies and Associate Professor of Religious Studies is “Religion 224: Introduction to the Judaic Experience,” wherein we survey the historical experience of the Israelites/Jews from the Biblical period to the present moment, the dominant philosophical and theological motifs of Judaism, the festival and life-cycle calendars as they historically and contemporarily manifest(ed) themselves, and issues of contemporary Jewish concern (e.g. the Holocaust and antisemitism, and Israeli and American Jewish survival).² In addition to attendance and class participation, the students’ graded responsibilities include a reaction paper to any book of their own choosing addressing the Judaic experience, a take-away final examination, and a *brief* (7-10 page) research paper, again on a topic of their own choosing addressing the Judaic experience. While, in the aggregate, the overwhelming majority of my undergraduate students are not Judaically knowledgeable or sophisticated, they continue to be fascinated by Jews and Judaism (primarily, I believe, because of the more “public face” of a more conservative fundamentalist-oriented Christianity in the American South).

This past fall semester (2003), one of my students turned in a research paper entitled “Judaism and Anti-Semitism: A Cycle of History.” With his permission and agreement (but without identification), I quote from his work:

[T]he persecution of Jews has occurred more often than not as a result of Jewish action or change. . . . The faith of Judaism in itself, with its dogmatically distinct views and beliefs, sparked religious persecution that spilled over into a multitude of varying degrees and forms throughout history. . . . The key dogmas of Judaism would lay the foundation for a chain reaction that would birth a multitude of beliefs which wholly (sic) define anti-Semitism. . . . It seems that, before and after the Holocaust, anti-Semitism is rooted in the same illogical roots—the myths and fear spread by Christianity, and, unfortunately, the beliefs of the Jews themselves. . . . Judaism has been the ultimate victim throughout history as its own faith and practices seem to work against the Jewish people. . . . it is not exactly fair to say that the Jewish people created the system of hate which has caused them turmoil for thousands of years; [but] Judaism, with its unique practices and frequent inter-faith conflicts, has led to the creation of many forms of persecution and prejudice that haunt its followers throughout time.

While it would, perhaps, be too easy to dismiss this writing as the work of a naïve undergraduate falling into the all-too-common contemporary manifestation of “blaming the victim,” or, worse, someone with an anti-Jewish or antisemitic agenda, his use of and quotation from such solid sources as Joshua Trachtenberg’s classic (1983) work *The Devil and the Jews: Medieval Conceptions of Anti-Semitism*; Peter Schaffer’s important (1997) text *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World*; and Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer’s recent (2002) book *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from*

Antiquity to the Present bespeak otherwise, and, therefore, raise, for me, the troubling question of whether there is something inherent in Judaism and the historical experiences of the Jewish people which has thus engendered this ongoing antisemitic response of the larger communities wherein Jews have lived and continue to live.³ And because I have been trained in reading, analyzing, and interpreting classical Jewish texts (Torah, Midrash, Talmud, etc.), and work in the cross-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary field known as “Religious Studies,” with a specialization in Holocaust and Genocide Studies and Post-*Shoah* Biblical (Hebrew Bible and New Testament) Re-interpretation, I wonder whether this question is equally applicable, however modified, to both Christianity and Islam as monotheistic religious traditions, both of which exist in tension rather than harmony with Judaism. I believe it is.

II. MONOTHEISTIC EXCLUSIVISM IN JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM: REPRESENTATIVE PASSAGES

While continually disharmonious and divisive amongst and between themselves, the one thing that unites the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam is their public expression of and commitment to One God, announced either as Adonai (Jews hesitant to speak the Ineffable Name of the Tetragrammaton), Father/Son [Christ]/Holy Ghost or Spirit, and Allah. We know this from the sacred or holy texts each tradition regards as central to its identity, also understood as the very revelation of that same Deity not only to its own community but to *all* humanity: the Torah or Hebrew Bible of the Jews, the Old and New Testaments of the Christians, and the Qur’an of the Muslims. While each community may raise and has raised serious questions regarding the full authenticity of the other’s texts, collectively, none deny the *Oneness* of their God, while, at the very same time, dismissing (or worse) any *other* understanding of what I choose to call the “divine-human encounter,” and, therefore, by extension, equally dismissing (or worse) *any* group presenting an alternative view.

A. *Judaism*

The Torah’s rejection of other gods, or, better, the “gods of others,” *for the people of Israel*, occupies a prominent position in the two places where the mis-named and mis-understood *Aseret Ha-Dibrot* (the so-called euphemistically named “Ten Commandments”) occur: Exodus 20:3 and Deuteronomy 5:7—“You shall have *no other gods* in My Presence!” Earlier, in the “Song of Moses” or “Song at the Sea,” Exodus 15:11, the very *superiority* of the God of Israel *to all other gods* is affirmed: “Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods?” [The late great Israeli biblical scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889-1964) reminds us here that the movement in the thought of Ancient Israel, reflected in the texts themselves, was from monolatry (i.e. the acceptance of the *reality* of

other nations' gods but the *superiority* of Israel's own) to that of monotheism (i.e. the understanding that the One God of Israel is, in fact, the Only Existent God).^{4]}

Thus, we find the idea that the One God affirmed in Psalms 50:1 ("The Mighty One, God the Lord, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting"), and that God's unique and special relationship with Zion/Israel in verses 2 ("Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth") and 4 ("His people"), 5 ("My faithful ones, who made a covenant with Me"),⁵ and 7 ("My people"). According to the prophet Malachi, that same One God is, indeed, God over all, according to 2:10: "Have we not *all* One Father? Has not One God created us?"

That the God of Israel is, ultimately, the Only God, is also reflected in the text. For example, Psalm 86:10 affirms this same God of Israel as the Only True Divine Reality ("For You are Great and do wondrous things, You Alone are God"), though two verses prior a seeming recognition of other divine realities is expressed ("There is none like You, among the gods, O Lord, nor are there *any* works like Yours"). Might we not see in this apparent contradiction a not-so-subtle lip service to the false understanding of others?

According to the prophet Jeremiah, 18:15, for example, when the people of Israel deviate from their covenantal responsibilities and obligations, they do so in response to a delusion ("But My people have forgotten Me, they burnt offerings to a delusion")—in defiance of the Only True God who exists, 10:10: "But the Lord is the True God, He is the Living God and the Everlasting Ruler. At His wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure His indignation."

Thus, summarily, these few representative examples, and there are many, many others, paint a portrait of the God of Israel—the God of the Jews—who is the Only Existent God, Alone and True, the One who will *not* tolerate *any* semblance of *other* divine realities, be they *false* or *delusionary*, on the part of His selected and elected and chosen covenantal community. How Jews (and others) have responded to this understanding will be addressed below.⁶

B. Christianity

The controversies surrounding the current moment of Mel Gibson's movie epic *The Passion of the Christ* notwithstanding, the "translation" of the "Word" of the Parent God into the human person of the Son God, Jesus the Christ, *textually* displaces the Parent and makes the Son the central bridge and connection back to the Parent, and, in so doing, equally displaces the original covenantal relationship of the Jews with their God from its initially-perceived first position into a demeaned second position, and, for some, a now-abrogated if not nullified non-existent position as well (e.g. Gospel of John 14:6: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. *No one goes to the Father except through Me.*" Gospel of John 10:9: "I am the Gate. Whoever enters *by Me* will be saved.")

This same Gospel account affirms the Onliness of God (5:44: “How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek glory that comes from the One who Alone is God?”), as does I Timothy 1:17 (“To the King of the Ages, Immortal, Invisible, the Only God. . .”) and Jude 1:25 (“to the Only God our Savior *through* Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, *power*, and *authority*, before all time and now and forever”).

Only this God *though* this Christ, then, possesses the *power* to grant eternity: John 17:3 (“And this is eternal life that they may know You, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent”), and Romans 16:27 (“. . .the Only Wise God, *through* Jesus Christ. . .”).

This same God, according to I Thessalonians 1:9, is a “Living and True God,” equally and importantly affirmed in I John 5:20-21: “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is True; and we are in Him who is True, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the True God and Eternal Life.”

As is the case with the Hebrew Bible, there are many, many texts throughout which could be cited in support of this understanding of the Onliness of this Parent God and the path to “salvation” and eternity *through* His Only Son Jesus the Christ. The uses to which these texts have been put—how they have been read, understood, interpreted, and used—will also be discussed below.

C. *Islam*

Whatever else the tragedy of September 11, 2001, and this country’s questionably labeled ongoing “war on terrorism” has done, it has focused our ignorance on the third great monotheistic religious tradition, Islam, its history and its texts. More courses are presently being taught, more experts and non-experts are benefiting from the various media spotlights, and a plethora of publications, creditable and suspect, are being issued and/or republished on a regular basis. My focus here, however, is on the texts of the Qur’an rather than, at the outset, socio-political or religio-theological realities. (Parenthetically, I would urge, however, on all those in attendance, a serious study not only of relevant and related history and politics, but of the Qur’an as well. An excellent place to start would be ‘Abdullah Yûsuf ‘Alî’s (1991) *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’ân: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentary* or Michael Sell’s (1999) *Approaching The Qur’ân: The Early Revelations*.)⁷

Like its predecessors the Hebrew Bible/Torah and New Testament, the Qur’an, too, equally affirms both the Onliness and the Oneness of the God/Allah in its various *suras*. 3:62 (The Family of Imran): “Most surely this is the *true* explanation, and there is *no god but Allah*; and most surely Allah—He is the Mighty, the Wise.” 37:35 (The Rangers): “Surely they used to behave proudly when it was said to them: There is *no god but Allah*.” 38:65 (Suad): “Say: I am only a warrior, and there is *no god but Allah*, the One, the Subduer

(of all).” 47:19 (Muhammad): “So know that there is *no god but Allah*, and ask protection for your fault and the believing men and the believing women; and Allah knows the place of your returning and your abiding.”

God’s Oneness is explicitly stated in 2:133 and 2:163 (The Cow): “. . .One God Only, and to Him do we submit”; and “And your God is One God! There is *no god* but He; He is the Beneficent, the Merciful.” 4:171 (The Women): “Allah is the Only One God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son, whatsoever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is Sufficient for a Protector.” 5:73 (The Dinner Table): “Certainly they disbelieve who say: Surely Allah is the third person of the three; but there is *no god* but the One God, and if they desist not from what they say, a painful chastisement shall befall those among them who disbelieve.” 16:51 (The Bee): “And Allah has said: Take not two gods. He is [the] Only One God; so of Me Alone should you be afraid.”

So, too, other relevant *suras* could be cited. Also central and fundamental to our understanding are two of the “Five Pillars of Islam”: Faith and Prayer (the other three being *Zakat* or charity, fasting during Ramadan, and *Hajj* or Pilgrimage to Makkah).⁸ The *Shahada* or “Declaration of Faith” of the pious Muslim is the simple formula “There is *no god* worthy of worship except God [Allah], and Muhammad is His messenger.” The Salat or “Call to Prayer” (dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and nightfall) offered by the muezzin is:

God is most great. God is most great.
 God is most great. God is most great.
 I testify that there is no god except God.
 I testify that there is no god except God.
 I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God.
 I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of God.
 Come to prayer! Come to prayer!
 Come to success (in this life and the Hereafter)!
 Come to success!
 God is most great! God is most great!
 There is no god except God.⁹

III. THE UNFORTUNATE AND TRAGIC USES OF SACRED TEXTS

Depending on whose ox is doing the goring—an allusion to Exodus 21:28-32¹⁰—the fundamental question, at least initially, is *not* that of the religio-theological and socio-political (and militarily violent) uses to which a text is put secondarily, but, rather, how one, either individual or group, reads or understands or analyzes a text, and then and only then, the behaviors or actions which flow from those readings and affirmations.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all what I call *literate* religious tradi-

tions, regardless of whether their own communities are themselves everywhere and at all times themselves literate. By this I both mean and understand that each attributes to its sacred texts *power superior* to that which might be ascribed to other writings even by adherents and leaders of their respective traditions. And because these sacred texts, both oral and written, at least initially, are perceived and affirmed as coming directly from God/Allah—what all three regard as the act of “revelation” (the Divine *revealing* [making known] Himself to His specially-related human communities)—their initial reception, however these texts are presented to us (original language *or* translation), are accepted *literally*, that is, the texts are read, comprehended, analyzed, *and accepted* based upon a supposedly accurate reception of the words themselves and their grammatical constructions. That is to understand, a text says what it says and means what it means and *not* what we would wish it to say or mean. And, coupled with the turn from oral to written transmission (scribal, printing, computer-generated), and our psychological too-easy acceptance of that which is written down and presented to us (i.e. the all-too-common “fallacy of the printed word”—that which is written is obviously *true*, for were it not true it would *not* be written), sacred texts, perhaps more than any other literary genre, leave other texts far, far in the distance.¹¹

Thus, Judaism and Christianity and Islam continue to do harm to themselves and to others stemming from their *literal* views of their understandings of God based upon their relationships to their sacred texts. Some Jews have taken a hard-line and, at times, violent position with regard to settlements throughout the Land of Israel and against those who would oppose them and settle in the same spaces or present alternative understandings, out of their literalist readings of the Hebrew Bible. Some Western Christians have, at times, violently evolved a theology of *triumphalist supercessionism* with regard to Jews over the last two thousand years, tragically successful because of the collusion of Christianity with the various governmental structures that have made their appearances throughout Europe and elsewhere, out of their literalist readings of the Old and New Testaments. Some Muslims have justified violence against non-Muslims—suicide bombers in Israel, September 11th attacks in the United States—based upon a *literalist* understanding of *ihadism* external to the personal struggles within oneself to become worthy of Allah, out of their literalist readings of the Qur’an. Thus, the very sacred texts of all three monotheistic religious traditions continue to be used to justify hateful and pre-genocidal acts and behaviors based upon those readings and consequent understandings.¹² Indeed, one could cite many other examples within each of these three monotheistic religious traditions.

IV. WHAT, THEN, IS TO BE DONE?

At this moment on the world scene, the voices of the literalists appear to be shouting the loudest, to the disadvantage of us all. In addition, calls for

calmness, civil and reasoned discourse, tolerance and respect for diverse and divergent points of view and perspectives result in hateful and violent, if not pre-genocidal, acts across and within these three religious communities. Israel has yet to come to grips with the religious significance of the tragedies of Orthodox Jew Baruch Goldstein's murder of Muslims at prayer at the mosque in Hebron, and of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by Orthodox Jew Yigal Amir. While the Roman Catholic Church has made significant and important strides and admissions in its relationship with Jews, and the Lutheran Church also has begun the always-painful task of self-examination, too many, both officially and otherwise within the various Protestant Christianities, have yet to truly begin the task of discerning whether both historical and contemporary teachings continue a pattern of denigrating the other who is not like themselves. Within the different strains of Islam, the urgent need to re-examine both teachings *and texts* as to whether those who do violence can and do derive their justifications for their behaviors from their readings/comprehensions/analyses appears to be too-slowly forthcoming. Indeed, Jonathan Kirsch writes in his newly-released book *God Against the Gods: The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism*:

When Arab suicide bombers carried out "martyr operations" in Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and when a Jewish physician opened fire on Muslims at prayer at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, each one was acting out a kind of zealotry that was inspired by a tragic misreading and misapplication of ancient texts.¹³

When, then, is to be done? Specifically, for all three great monotheistic religious communities, is there another way (other than literally) to read, comprehend, and analyze these sacred and holy texts of each tradition and still accord them the power and authority historically ascribed to them, as well as to acknowledge their primary position as the inter-connection between the human and the Divine? At the very same time, can such a different reading espoused by others within these communities empower those who wish to both remain within and reach out beyond, religio-theologically as well as socio-politically, to begin the arduous journey toward curbing the hate and the violence? Intellectually, I do believe that can be the case, drawing upon the long-honored though too-often ignored Judaic reading tradition of what I now call "The Mid-rashic Way,"¹⁴ that is, a 2,000-year-old non-literal interpretive commentary tradition and conversation of and by the rabbis with the Hebrew Scriptures and now encompassing both New Testament and Qur'an.¹⁵ The idea is not initially mine, but rather that of Orthodox Jewish feminist and author Blu Greenberg, though her specific frames of reference were the *Shoah* or Holocaust and only the Gospels.

In her (1989) article "The Holocaust and the Gospel Truth: Christian Con-

frontations with the Holocaust,” published in the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Greenberg wrote:

In as much as I believe, like many others, that the *Shoah* is not a freak event vis-à-vis Christian Gospels but, rather, the expressed culmination of a suppressed rage against the Jews *embedded within its words*, I shall proceed to take the liberties that ecumenism vests in us.

The conclusion I draw from the Holocaust and from the four decades following it, is that Christianity needs a Talmud and a Midrash that deal with the foundation documents of its faith; that Christians of the next two thousand years ought not to be able to read or teach or understand first century Christianity without these hermeneutical texts of quasi-canonical status; that in the year 2500 a Christian child standing at any point along the religious denominational spectrum will not and need not know where the Scripture leaves off and quasi-Scripture begins.

Why do I use terms such as Talmud and Midrash, so particular to the Jewish tradition? In order to precisely convey *the notions of power, authority, and sacredness*, as Talmud and Midrash have done for Jewish for so many centuries unto this very day. Or, to present this in a more ironic fashion—it is not too late, eighteen hundred years later, for Christianity to do what Judaism of the other Jews did in the first century: to become a religion of the “two Torahs.”

Such is the conclusion drawn by a twentieth-century post-Holocaust Jew who has been informed by more than two decades of the Jewish-Christian encounter. In fact, I have arrived at this conclusion as much through a series of encounters and experiences as through academic study (pp. 273-274).¹⁶

Ms. Greenberg’s radically innovative idea for the Christianities, and my expansion of it to include the Muslims, has not yet been given the attention it now needs in our increasingly violent world. Nor have the calls for more “midrashic readings” of the Hebrew biblical text been heard or affirmed in Israel by her non-Orthodox political leadership, or here in the United States (or elsewhere) by those who are among Israel’s most vocal supporters and willing defenders. I would also add that, for this process to succeed, and here I am indebted to German Catholic thinker Johannes Baptist Metz and the late French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, the time has now come for all three great religious traditions to begin to read their own sacred scriptures *in the presence of the other*. How fitting, then, in conclusion, to paraphrase the words of the Second Century Talmudic sage Rabbi Tarphon in the Jewish ethical tractate known as *Pirkei Avot/Sayings of the Fathers*:

The day is short and the task is great and the workers are sluggish, and the reward is much, and the Master of the house is urgent. It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to desist from it. (2:19)

NOTES

1. (1) If the assumptions of this paper are reasonably accurate and reasonably correct, how do we educate Jews, Christians, Muslims to re-think their understandings of their sacred texts in conversation with their own communities and across their communities (i.e. the question of the “other”), to, ultimately, lessen the ongoing potential for hate-related and genocidally-related activities?

(2) Does the recognition of the power of these sacred texts and the exclusive authority associating them with God/Allah, ultimately require a total re-thinking of our collective understanding of these texts and their place(s) within their own communities and in relationship to those outside their own communities?

(3) What are the practical implications of such re-thinking in seminary and congregational and communal curricula, liturgical expressions, and the like? How, in concrete terms, is this work to be accomplished?

2. I also teach an upper-level seminar, primarily for juniors and seniors: “Religion 347: Jewish-Christian Relations,” the course description for which reads:

In this course, we will critically examine the 2,000 year-old relationship between Jews and Christians, both historically and contemporarily, by focusing our microscopes on such areas as the following: (1) Rabbinic Judaism or Jewish-Gentile Christianity, (2) Hebrew Bible or Old/Testament/New Testament, (3) Jewish Messiah or Christian Jesus, (4) Jewish Mission or Great Commission, (5) Antisemitism or Anti-Judaism, (6) Holocaust or Shoah, (7) Land/State of Israel or Holy Land, and (8) Jewish Movements or Christian Denominations. Class format will consist of lectures, discussions, reactions to readings, student presentations, and, where appropriate, video materials.

Note: The use of the word “or” in the course description is intended to suggest what I maintain are the ongoing “tension points” of this relationship that refuse to go away. (The actual syllabus and other information are available on our departmental website, www.as.ua.edu/rel).

An additionally relevant course, also for upper-level students, is “Religion 490: Religion and Genocide,” whose course description is as follows:

This course seeks to explore the phenomenon of genocide by examining its relationship to the phenomenon of religion in both its institutional and theological frameworks, beginning with scriptural passages (Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Qur’an) classified as having genocidal intent. Both historical examples (e.g. Armenian Genocide, Soviet Collectivization, Holocaust) and contemporary examples (e.g. Rwanda, Bosnia) are likewise examined to ascertain whether or not there are religious components to each genocide. The concluding part of this course will address the question “What positive role can religions play to mitigate against future genocides?” Format of this course will consist of lectures, discussion of readings, student presentations, and, where appropriate, video materials.

Note: A somewhat different version of this syllabus was first published in Joyce Apsel and Helen Fein, ed., *Teaching About Genocide: An Interdisciplinary Guidebook with Syllabi for College and University Teachers* (Washington, DC: American Sociological Association, 2002), 116-118. It is the only syllabus which addresses this question of the interface between religion and genocide.

3. His full bibliography consists of Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer, *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present* (New York, NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2002); Peter Schaffer (1997), *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Michel Selzer, *Kike!* (New York, NY: Strait Arrow Books, 1972); Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews:*

Medieval Conceptions of Anti-Semitism (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983); John Weiss, *The Politics of Hate* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dees, 2003); and Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism* (London, GB: Methuen, 1991).

4. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

5. A most serious and important study of this question is to be found in David Novak, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People* (Cambridge, UK/New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

6. It is important to note at the outset that no parity whatsoever is implied regarding the various uses and abuses of these texts by the Jewish, Christian, and/or Muslim communities and those who choose to read and understand them literally and act upon their understandings.

7. ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’ān: New Edition with Revised Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, MD: Amana Corporation, 1991). Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur’ān: The Early Revelations* (Ashland, OR: White Cloud Press, 1999).

8. Significant Jewish parallels here are (1) Tzedakah or “righteous fiscal (and other) obligations;” fasting, primarily on Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement; and the three Sh’losh regalim or “Pilgrimage Festivals” of Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Weeks), and Sukkot (Booths). The Shahada may be said to parallel Deuteronomy 6:4: “Hear O Israel: Adonai is our God, Adonai alone”; and the notion of Prayer is the obligation incumbent on religiously devout Jews three times a day (morning, afternoon, evening).

9. www.islamcity.com/mosque/pillars.shtml

10. 21:(28) When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. (29) If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall be put to death. (30) If a ransom has been imposed on the owner, then the owner shall pay whatever is imposed for the redemption of the victim’s life. (31) If it gores a boy or a girl, the owner shall be dealt with according to this same rule. (32) If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall pay to the slaveowner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

11. A fascinating discussion of this whole question of literality is found in Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2000).

12. For an assessment of the genocidal potential possible as a result of such readings, see Leo Kuper, “Theological Warrants for Genocide: Judaism, Islam, Christianity,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 2(3) (1990): 351-379; and Leonard B. Glick, “Religion and Genocide,” in *The Widening Circle of Genocide/Genocide: A Critical Bibliographical Review—Volume 3*, ed. Israel W. Charny (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 43-74.

13. Jonathan Kirsch, *God Against the Gods: The History of the War Between Monotheism and Polytheism* (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2004), 283.

14. The brevity of this paper does not permit a further fleshing out of this idea, complete with “midrashic readings” of Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur’an, but only its introduction in this context.

15. Two interesting examples of this midrashic approach are Henry F. Knight’s *Confessing Christ in a Post-Holocaust World: A Midrashic Experiment* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000); and James F. Moore’s *Christian Theology After the Shoah* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993).

16. Blu Greenberg, “The Holocaust and the Gospel Truth: Christian Confrontations with the Holocaust,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 4(3) (1989): 273-282. Emphases not in original.

