

# **The Religious Psychology of the Middle East Conflict**

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## Preface

I have spent more than a decade, late in life when decades are getting scarce, writing a 400 page philosophical study of the Middle East conflict called *The Ishmael Factor*, which I have published myself. Two professional writers told me it was too big and complicated, addressing too many different readers, too digressive and wordy, and too much work for the reader. I accept about half of that judgment, but after reading through it twice in print I still think it does what I set out to do. So I am persevering, but first with a much smaller book.

Warnings aside, I really do want to address both traditional theists and secular intellectuals and show the religious question fueling the fires of the Middle East, the argument between humanism and theism about how the human problem can be solved. Is it by human effort or by divine promise? Is Ishmael or Isaac our model? The question has taken on political flesh, as we ask, Will the Arab Muslims or the Jews prevail in Palestine?

I still want to dialectically discover the strengths and weaknesses of the “Players” in the Middle East, playing the points of view off each other. We have the Attackers, Defenders, Correctors, Excusers, Postmodernists, Religious Pluralists, and Zionists, but is there a *Master Narrative* that puts these voices together into a coherent account?

On a reduced scale, using few written sources, I want to show again how arguments and facts have gotten us nowhere in understanding this crisis. Facts are gathered together as needed, following the agendas of the players. What we need, instead, is to explore their different *narratives*, looking for the over-arching Story that contains them all.

Since the player standing closest to a possible *Master Narrative* is Zionism, and since biblical thought is easily dismissed in our time, I need to theorize about human consciousness, so I can present *as science* the biblical analysis of the psychology of the Middle East. The analysis comes mostly through narrative, but it has a psychological foundation in the natural origin of humankind.

Finally, I want to look closely at the psychology of the Middle East conflict through the story of Hagar and Ishmael, where we find a revealed diagnostic analysis of the anger pouring out upon the world. We find, ultimately, that the problem applies to us all.

Looking again at my fat book, I decided that if *The Ishmael Factor* makes sense, then I can say it 50 pages, not 400. So in about four months I wrote through the same train of thought as directly as possible. I gave it an academic title and a plain cover. I hope readers will be able to find out in a few days, rather than a few months, what the interminable Middle East conflict is telling us about ourselves.

## ABSTRACT

We understand the Middle East problem from many points of view, but reflection shows they are all *self-justifying* explanations. Factual treatments are governed by the *narrative* of the group promoting them, but real understanding requires a *Master Narrative*, with no agenda but to impart beneficent guidance. Zionism is connected to that transcendent understanding, but impure in practice.

Such an Answer is impossible if religious truth is subjective and has no truth value. But a naturalistic account of human origin shows that *consciousness* produces objective conditions of human experience, especially *guilt* and the need to be accepted. Religions seek to solve that problem, but *human religion* (defensive humans trying to be good) does not relieve guilt. Mythology and stories in the early Bible show a long *complaint* of the human spirit, in Prometheus, Adam, Cain, and Job, against *Transcendent Power* and the fact that humans are lost in a world of trouble. This complaint is motivating Islamism, but subliminally; Islam does not acknowledge its argument with transcendent power, but passes the blame to Jews and the powerful West.

The complaint narrows down to the religious question whether salvation is by *human effort* or only by *divine provision*. Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar live out that question, and Isaac becomes the child of *Promise*, while Ishmael and Hagar are expelled, to show that human religion does not win God's favor. Yet Hagar gets an apparent divine imprimatur upon her future, and she and Ishmael are rescued and restored. Now the Arab-Muslim world practices human religion openly, with no respect for Zionism or the gospel. The religious argument has come to life politically, as the Jews pursue the promise that Isaac will inherit the land, and the Arabs fight against their disinheritance. The human spirit defends the Arabs against the judgment contained in their expulsion, that religion is futile. The cultural memory of rejection and divine vindication has formed for them an *alternative transcendence*, which glorifies the victim and gives their fight against the Jews and the West its special power.

The good news is that Ishmael will be *heard by God*, corrected and restored. But not only Ishmael will be *heard*. The unsolvable Middle East conflict is being used to bring all of humankind to awareness of the religious question stirring here, so convicting self-awareness and restoration are offered to everyone.

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# The Religious Psychology of the Middle East Conflict

Jerry L. Sherman, PhD

## I. Introduction: Explaining the Blame Game

DOES ANYONE UNDERSTAND the Middle East conflict? Do we understand the century-long dispute over Palestine or the ravages of global terror? When the Twin Towers collapsed into ashes, did we have any sense of what the Islamists in the airplanes were trying to say?

We might say, Yes, everyone understands the problem—*each group from its own point of view.*

The Islamists understand the evil that is Zionism, along with the broader evil that is the power of the West and its religious and political traditions, made worse by its immorality and decadence.

Moderate citizens of Israel and the West understand that “There will always be evil in the world,” as President George W. Bush put it shortly after the 9-11 attack. They know they are justified in defending themselves against the violence of the Islamists.

Conservative commentators of the West pointedly diagnose the dysfunctional transfer of blame in Palestinians and Islamists, their failure to take responsibility for their difficulties. And they admonish these miscreants to follow the tried and true political principles of the Enlightenment.

But the Liberal-Left in the West understands that the crimes of Israel make Palestinian rage inevitable, and that Israel and the West bring on global terrorism by their colonial presence in the world and their harsh responses to insurgencies, what Noam Chomsky calls “state terror.”

Philosophical trends are mixed into these people groups, so that some understand the Middle East crisis through the postmodern lenses of relativism and amoralism, making it nothing more than a power struggle, with no right and wrong about it, and by the same token, with no good explanation.

Religious pluralism claims that all religions are essentially alike, teaching peace, so that religious conflict comes only from extremists who miss the point of their own religion. President Obama said this in his visit to Egypt early in his presidency.

But if every group understands the conflict in a different way, then there really is no understanding. None of these six “explanations” tells the story. They do not agree, and they cannot account for their disagreement, except by saying that the others are wrong. None of them sees the big picture that accounts for the conflict itself *and* all the attempted understandings of it.

Is there a “Big Picture”? We all have our stories, but is there a *Master Narrative*? Is there a comprehensive understanding of the Arab-Israel conflict and the global jihad aimed at the power of the West? Or are we stuck in our various points of view?

I believe we are not stranded in our disagreements, but it is not easy to find a starting point for the discussion. We do not have a problem that stands still for our examination, unaffected by our views of it; instead, we have a set of “explanations” interacting with each other, “explaining” each other, and *these* are what needs to be explained. Wars are caused, we could say, by our beliefs about our enemies, so our “explanation” of the conflict is usually our justification of the part we play in it, based on how we perceive the enemy.

We do not just use propaganda to support military actions, but we choose those actions by how we see the enemy and ourselves. Beliefs about each other cause and justify the conflict and are the material out of which an over-arching explanation will be formed, if one can be found.

This means we are all invested in the conflict even as we seek to understand it. Naively, we each think we have found the facts that determine the correct outcome of the conflict, but in reality each perspective piles up its own facts, like rocks in a barricade, to defend its position.

If there is a way out of this morass, it is to discern the *story* in each pile of facts, the narrative that determined how the facts were gathered. Then we can look at these embattled narratives together, playing them off each other dialectically, looking for a guiding story that makes sense of their interactions.

There is a big story into which the smaller stories fit, but all hell breaks loose when I give its source: the *Zionists*—the Jews and Christians who support Israel! These two arouse extreme suspicion, first of all for even believing there is a master narrative, and that they might have it. Postmodern pluralism and relativism require that no party to a disagreement can ever be the “right” one. So even though every arguer actually thinks his or her own view is correct, a formal treatment saying that one of the players is really the referee will be quickly dismissed. And yet that is exactly what we are arguing about here, and in the streets of the Middle East: whether or not Israel has a moral and historical right to its place in the promised land, as shown by the biblical revelation. The legitimacy of Israel and the authority of her tradition are both being challenged

The Zionist position comes under suspicion as a purported master narrative, but even more so because its biblical messages deeply offend the human spirit, which sees itself as worthy of approval and capable of meeting its needs. Islamism can be faulted for its exclusivism, especially when violent against the “infidels,” yet we will see that it is largely excused for that sin, because it does not violate the spirit of humanism. It is what I will be calling “human religion,” theistic in outward appearance but humanistic at heart.

The heart of the conflict is between human self-reliance and the transcendent judgment that humans are dependent upon divine mercy. It is thus between two value systems, one built on human strength and the other offering divine beneficence. Religiously and politically, the troubled interaction is between the Arab Muslim and Judeo-Christian narratives, expressed in the faces of Ishmael and Isaac, representing the religion of human works versus that of divine provision. But the actual players in the world are not so neatly divided, so we will be looking at seven of them. These are people groups, but with mixture and overlap, better understood as positions in the argument about what is going on in the Middle East.

The *Attackers* are the Islamists, seeking to correct the great wrong they feel is put upon them by all power outside Islam, in particular by the false religions of Judaism and Christianity and the power of the West. Their *jihad* is a defense against those powers, but it manifests itself as an attack. In response, the *Defenders* are moderate citizens of Israel and the West protecting themselves. They are helped by the *Correctors*, the conservative and moderate commentators of the West, who see the dysfunctional transfer of blame in Islamism and hold up expectations of more “Enlightened” and responsible conduct. The Liberal-Left, known here as the *Excusers*, counters the corrections with a sympathetic understanding of the Islamist plight, but as “enablers,” offering *excuses*. Their ideological link to the Islamists will be examined closely in this study. Postmodern relativism and religious pluralism complete the six explanatory Players, acting as tools of the Excusers by weakening the corrections coming from Western tradition.

The Zionists are a complex mixture, primarily made up of Israeli and other Jews who support Israel, joined by Christian Zionists, who are emerging as an important arm of the Church. These overlap with Defenders and Correctors, but they add the special ingredient of a transcendent authority, giving Israel her destiny in the Promised Land, and offering that promising Bigger Story, which explains all the other explanations—but in the smoke and fire of a fierce counter-offensive.

The Defenders and the Correctors rely upon what they consider timeless principles, a mix of revealed religion and human reason. When those principles are applied as corrections, the Islamists and their Liberal-Leftist supporters (the *Attackers* and their *Excusers*) will strip them of transcendence by a postmodern tactic that re-labels them as manifestations of Western power. So the moral structure within which we might judge the situation is politicized and loses its authority.

At the same time, the Islamist will hold up his own transcendent source, the will of Allah, so it looks as if we have two transcendent Gods, with totally different views of what ought to happen in the Middle East. But the more sophisticated among us, the Postmodernists and Religious Pluralists, will laugh and say that both sides are dreaming up a god to support them in their will to power. So we differ over *whose* transcendence is right and over whether there is any transcendence.

A struggle like this does not reduce to an *us-them* battle of equals (as relativism claims). There is a stronger and a weaker side, and the strong generally say that the weak should happily submit, while the weak feel they must fight against the evil power. But since the stronger side structures society and establishes the rules by which it is run, the weaker is a revolutionary or anarchist. The argument is not over what should happen, as judged by a given set of rules, but about which rules to use (revolution), and whether or not there are rules (anarchy).

The weak battle the strong from within the structure imposed by the strong. This is the shape of the Middle East conflict and many other struggles. One can interpret this from either side, as when the Liberal-Progressive says that revolution against dominating power is good, or when the Conservative says that rebellion against the establishment is bad. But both of those claims are incomplete and vulnerable to critique. They need to be imbedded in a larger context.

This shape of the conflict makes it difficult to study. Intellectually, the Liberal challenges the norms of the establishment, even the notion of Truth itself. But the Conservative finds this wrong and destructive, even suicidal when carried to its anarchic extreme. To understand world politics we need a neutral point of view, tradition holds, but the Left thinks there is none, only the structure the strong have put on the world. Traditional norms have been politicized, construed as nothing but the will of the conqueror.

A reader may doubt that the political pattern—the weak fighting the strong from within the structure imposed on them—reappears in the intellectual battle. But the Left has always had its anarchic intent, to tear down the powerful *and* their

values. Even physics had its “revolutionary” form. Now the Postmodernists and the Religious Pluralists are part of the team that is battling the Western tradition, and they clearly intend to keep “truth” from being too demanding, and to rob religion of its guiding power, which is taken as oppression.

I began this study in the Corrector position, which was natural to me as a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male, an American, over fifty, and a Christian Zionist. But I was quickly thrown from my horse and made to start over, when I turned an eye inward to ask about the *motives* lying beneath this position. Postmodern *suspicion* appeared, wanting to *deconstruct* every position by showing that each is in fact a *construct* of that person’s motives. Under this influence, we see our beliefs’ starting points, their biases and assumptions—their hidden agendas.

As a philosopher, I could not ignore the cogency of the postmodern critique. I realized that the American nice-guy commentator, who has the answers tucked away neatly in his Biblical and Enlightenment principles, has his agenda, too, and though his footing might be fairly solid, his grasp of his transcendent source is impure. He is compromised because he seeks to empower and justify himself by the beliefs he is allied with. He is well-meaning, but “in the parent” toward the Arab Muslims, and *smug*. More importantly, his admonitions are ineffective.

To speak from any of these positions as we normally do, without reflecting on our underlying motives, is to preach to the choir and never engage the other side. We remain behind our barricades, and our understanding is only of how we are right in our beliefs and actions. But that “rightness” can easily be deconstructed: we believe and act as we do in order to feel that we are among the good guys.

All of this, the war and our entrenched explanations of it, is hopeless, if there is no Master Narrative. If there is one, it give us wisdom about how all of us are defending ourselves. But whether or not there can be a Master Narrative is a big part of the Middle East question. The battle against the power of the West and the power of Zionism is also against the power of truth and moral authority, as expressed in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is against *transcendence*, although it is an open question at this point whether the West’s “transcendence” is genuine.

My own Corrector position was *deconstructed* by the postmodern insight into its motives and assumptions, but I did not abandon it. I identify with the American Conservative commentator mind set, but more critically, more reflectively. It is my cultural home base, but I take it with a grain of salt. I recognize its impurity, the way I have turned Enlightenment Politics into a self-serving tool, making it an idol.

What emerged more solidly for me after this cleansing process was my Christian Zionism. I do find there a *Master Narrative*, a point of view that transcends all of our agendas. My candidate for this position is the *usual suspect*, the Bible, which for many will be the obvious source of objective, unprejudiced knowledge on important matters of human life, and which for many others will be the utter villain—*for claiming to be such a source*. Whether a Master Narrative exists is at issue, but the Bible does claim to tell us what should happen in Palestine, and the players there are largely defined by their differing responses to what it says.

The Bible is not a dogmatic shortcut to understanding the Middle East. Since biblical Zionism is itself a chief player in the conflict—a point of view and set of interests—it would be presumptuous to simply speak from that perspective without justification. It is identified with God’s word on Israel and Palestine, but such authority is deeply suspected: *Those European Christians and Jews with their imperious “moral tradition” have been running the world too long, people think. They have used their “transcendent authority” to force their will on the world.*

The Islamists in Palestine feel the brunt of Western power as actual Jews on the ground with uniforms and rifles, and the world frowns with them in disapproval. The Islamists fortify their complaint with their claim to be the true voice of transcendence, the will of Allah, with very different findings about what is correct for Palestine.

Each point of view on this conflict serves the agenda of those who hold it. *But if there is a position that has no agenda itself, or if it is totally beneficent in its intention, and if it reveals the agendas of all the other players and shows their connections one to another, then we have found the Master Narrative.* This is our place from which to genuinely understand the Middle East conflict.

From this God’s-eye point of view—which can exist hypothetically for us as we test its fruitfulness—all the purported explanations of the Middle East conflict are *self-justifying explanations*. The agenda each has is to look like one of the good guys in the struggle, putting the blame elsewhere. But the Master Narrative shows that no player is innocent, and no one deserves to win or has the solution. The self-justifying intent behind these explanatory attempts disqualifies them all. But as we recognize this underlying intent, we find ourselves looking at what the conflict is all about: *justification*.

This is true in three ways. First, justification is the topic of the story of Abraham’s two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. They represent two different ways to please God. One can try hard to be a good, religious person (or a nice, harmless non-religious person), but this is ineffective, because it requires of humans a

goodness that is only in God. Or one can receive acceptance as a free gift, without merit, with all the credit going to God. These two ideas sit across the great divide that separates genuine biblical Judaism and Christianity from Islam and from every other religion, including most historical expressions of Judaism and Christianity. On one side is the gospel, known to a Christian Zionist as the heart of Torah, and across from it stands the huge enterprise I will be calling “human religion.” That this is the issue between Jews and the Ishmaelites in Palestine will need to be shown, but it is the main idea of this book.

Justification is central also because Islamism is powered by guilt, which is the failure of justification. People seek to justify themselves in many ways, especially in the methods of human religion, and Islam is a clear example. But human methods do not work, so religious people remain guilty and are motivated by that pressure. Islamists are the extreme case, driven by unresolved guilt to religious fanaticism, with suicide and murder.

Justification is at the heart of the conflict, finally, because our explanations of it are all attempts to see ourselves as the good guys. That is, the conflict *is* these explanations struggling together. Wars are caused by our beliefs about the enemy and ourselves, by our justifying of self and vilifying of the other. The suicide bombing is where self-justification and demonization intersect: *I earn my salvation by killing those infidels who are ruining the world!*

Does a Bible story (Genesis 16 and 21) and its New Testament interpretation (Galatians 4:21-31) have the power to pull together the various stories doing battle in the Middle East crisis? Clearly, the Bible promises transcendent understanding of the future of Israel or Palestine, and of the fortunes of both Arabs and Jews. But the biblical guidance here is widely distrusted. This distrust is both the problem being studied and the impediment to studying it. I have argued above that we cannot simply take a position and speak unreflectively from there, so let us look closely at the possible explanations.

## II. The Players

I began by listing six possible explanations for the Middle East conflict, and then I added Zionism as a seventh player, who brings with him a possibly transcendent point of view, but against the severe opposition of those who are suspicious of Jewish, Christian, and Western thinking. The labels name positions and arguments more clearly than people groups; they correspond to actual groups of people, but with overlap and mixture. For instance, Israeli Jews are mostly Zionists, but some object, and the Defender and Corrector arguments are a big part of Zionist thinking.

### *Isaac and Ishmael*

In a way we have just two groups. The Defenders (moderate citizens of Israel and the West) join the Correctors (Conservative commentators in the West) and the Zionists (Jewish and Christian supporters of Israel and her destiny in the Land) to form one side, supporting the power of the West and its biblical and Enlightenment tradition. The Attackers (Islamists in Palestine and the Islamic world overall), Excusers (Liberals and the New Left who support Palestinians and Islamism), and the Postmodernists and Religious Pluralists (philosophical stances imbedded in liberalism and the cultural Left) all serve the other side, which opposes the biblical tradition and the power of the West.

The two groups identify with Isaac and Ishmael, but not explicitly, except in the case of the Jews and the Arab Muslims. Looking closely, we will see each group playing its part in the syndrome associated with these two figures.

In the biblical story, Abraham has his first born, Ishmael, and his child of promise, Isaac, but when Ishmael shows scorn for Isaac he is removed from the household. This is a judgment about how humans can overcome guilt and relate to God, not by the efforts of human religion, as with Ishmael—“born according to the flesh”—but by the power and provision of God, as with Isaac—“born according to the Spirit.” (Gal. 4:29) Isaac is prevailing and Ishmael is being set aside. Galatians interprets this as the covenant of grace overcoming the covenant of law. But all of this comes from the Christian-Jewish-Biblical narrative.

In the Islamic narrative, Ishmael has not been rejected. He and Abraham were restored and together rebuilt the Ka’bah, the holy shrine at Mecca. He was the one nearly sacrificed in the great test of faith that Jews and Christians believe occurred when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice Isaac. Genesis shows Hagar

and her son Ishmael being saved from death by divine provision, and Islam expands on that and makes it a high point of the Haaj, when Muslims as a crowd act out the finding of the well that saved them.

Since there are two narratives, we see Ishmael two ways. In this biblical analysis, Ishmael lives “over against all his kinsmen” (Gen 16:12), in conflict with the household that has dispossessed him. This fits the pattern of the weaker rebelling from within the confines of the stronger. He becomes a great nation (Gen 21:13,18), but he finds himself crouched in defiance against a greater world. The pattern surfaces within Islam as the Shi’a-Sunni divide, the “faction” pitted against the “tradition.”

Rejection is not officially part of Islam’s story, and Ishmael is vaunted as the father of the Arab nation. The critique of human religion (the *rejection* of it), as in Paul’s interpretation of Hagar and Sarah as two covenants, is not in their story. Nevertheless, in the real world, it is the rejected Ishmael who occupies the stage of world politics. Ishmael feels it is unfair that Isaac was chosen, that the Jews should prevail. This is the religious psychology we will be exploring.

Since Ishmael’s name means “God hears,” or even “The Lord has given heed to your affliction” (Gen. 16:11), his rejection is not terminal. But it is a serious, long-term historical process that bears out the judgment of God against human religion and the human pride and guilt-mongering that it perpetuates.

### *The Attacker*

Ishmael is the Attacker, the Player without whom the Middle East problem and a thousand books about it would not exist. The label is prejudicial, because the Arab Muslims can as well say that they have been attacked by Zionism and the West. But it fits what we see in the news, in the Intifadas (the *casting off* of Zionist power), the bus bombings, and the rockets across the border into Israel. And we see attacks worldwide against the power structures of the West, climaxed in the Twin Towers dissolving into piles of ash.

In the early 21st century thousands of people all over the world are willing and prepared to commit suicide in order to bring injury and death to as many randomly selected human beings as possible. This came upon us gradually, so we may fail to appreciate its horrific magnitude. Ruthless hatred and violence have semi-official sanction among millions of people.

The official name here is “Islamism,” or “radical Islam,” not including the moderate Muslims of the world. We know, though, that radical Islam is present to some degree everywhere. The religious psychology of the Islamists is built on the religion itself, not just extreme practice, so it will apply in quiet, non-violent ways to all kinds of Muslims. Anyone serious about Islam will believe that he or she is

right with God in a way that the Jews and the Christians are not, and that these religions are a hindrance to Islam. Some tolerance and religious pluralism exists among educated Muslims, but it is a minor player.

The mind set of Islamism is a subspecies of the broader fact that all humans live in pride and guilt, and everyone tries to deal with the problem, through overtly religious practices and through secular mind sets that have the same justifying intent. These efforts are known generically here as “human religion,” which is ineffective against guilt, hiding it and transferring it to others. Guilt often entraps adherents in oscillating pride and condemnation. It causes many dysfunctional behaviors.

The specific syndrome with Islamism includes the transfer of guilt into the Jews, Christians, and the powerful West—and especially onto Zionism, which now encroaches on Islam’s political space. It also includes the establishment of an *alternative transcendence*, a construct of unresolved guilt. Even while fighting against the moral-political norms by which the West has stretched its hand across the globe, Islamists have their own seemingly transcendent value system (and new world order) in Allah, who supports them in their fight against the Bible and the West. The divine sanction for violence is a disguise for the driving force of guilt.

The alternative transcendence supports fundamentalism, but this does not keep Islamists from being allied with secular Liberals and those of the Left, however different their outward style. Their “transcendence” stands against the same biblical power and authority that the Liberals and Leftists dislike. Secular and religious humanism are more alike than different, and their mutual foe is the anti-humanistic message of the Bible.

The bizarre suicidal impulse that drives Islamist violence is rooted in the same spirit of anarchy that appeared in the early days of Marxism, and in Communism’s murderous purges. Guilt itself declares that humans ought to perish, and this self-hatred appears in the destructive attacks of global terrorism, even while the blame is being transferred to others. Since suicide is often the method by which the attacks come, the guilty self-hatred is turned inward, too.

In addition to mass attacks, there are religious murders, most often of Christians in Islamic territory, also where Communism remains extreme, like North Korea. Short of being murdered, Christians lose their civil rights in those places and also in the West, due to the advancing power of antinomian movements. All of this is resistance by the human spirit toward the biblical message.

A special case—still part of the “Attack”—is the quiet but steady harassment of Messianic Jews in Israel, or their being coolly distanced by Jews in the U.S. Gentile Christians are welcomed in Israel, but their proselytizing

(“missionizing”) is despised. With the Holocaust so close behind and the Islamist threat so large, persecution *by* Jews is hardly mentionable, and yet Judaism is a human religion that resists the gospel. It *contains* the gospel, but that fact mostly lies hidden. In spite of this resistance, Islam accurately puts Jews on the “wrong” side with Christians, sharing the onus of having claimed to speak universally for God, threatening Islamic beliefs.

### *The Defenders*

The reality of the Attackers gives birth to the *Defenders*—the people in the West and in Israel who believe they are being attacked by unprovoked and inexplicable evil. One has clear moral bearings from the Defender position: *If they would leave us alone, we would leave them alone. If not, then we must defeat them.*

A weakness of the Defender position is that it seems reversible: *we* defend ourselves against *them*, being sure we are okay and they are wrong, but they could say the same of us. These positions are not truly reversible, because the Defenders support the necessary structures of human society, while the Attackers promote anarchy. Violent revolution temporarily disrupts life for a good cause, in theory, but the ledger of death from the Left and now from Islamism suggests a more fundamental alignment against established power itself, not against only misplaced power.

Psychologically, the positions *are* reversible. Each side can justify itself as saving society from a great evil. And this hidden agenda of self-justification means that the Defenders risk losing objectivity; they might see the world as they want to see it, in order to see themselves on the side of the Good.

The Defender position is flawed also because it feels no need to understand its enemy, as long as we are sure this is the enemy. We can say “There will always be evil,” as if we had nothing to learn ourselves. I do not suggest that terrorism is brought on by the sins of the West, as the Excuser claims, but only that this unstoppable force coming from the East could help us learn crucial things about the human condition that apply to everyone.

Also, the Defenders must believe that this evil can be conquered. There is no evidence that it can, by human means, because every victory on the part of the West energizes the opposition. In the psychology we will be exploring, losing is their special kind of winning

The strength of the Defender position, not often expressed in plain words and strongly resisted when made explicit, is the idea that power is not bad, and beneficent power is possible, as in Plato’s idea of a wise and powerful aristocracy. So it is right to leave existing power alone. The idea is resisted because power is

often abused, but more fundamentally because the human spirit does not easily bow before even the best of power. Yet common sense shows that even when power is imperfect both the strong and the weak are better off without conflict. It is better to be unfree than at war (*pace* Patrick Henry), better to have an unfair job than no job at all.

Liberal-Progressives will find this an arrogant expression of conservatism at its worst. When Conservatives say they are using their power to the advantage of everyone, the Liberal will chortle and say, *Yes, power is good, when you have it*. In Liberal thought revolutions against established power are romanticized. Yet few revolutions have had the glorious results they promised, and generally a new power structure is quickly put into place. People learn to live semi-cheerfully under its power, if they have jobs and security.

Defenders looking at the Arab-Israeli conflict will say that power is in the hands of Israel, so the Palestinians would do better living under that power. This is not a zero-sum game with respect to overall welfare, and the Arab Muslims in Palestine could prosper within the economy and political structure built by the Zionist influx. In many respects they have, and it is plain to many that resisting Israel is their trouble, not the existence of Israel.

On the other hand, the Arabs in Palestine can argue that they are defending themselves against the unjustified incursion of the Zionist state into their territory. This gets us into a “who started it?” quandary, typical of any self-defense courtroom plea. The Israelites took the land from the Canaanites, and the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and ultimately the Romans took it from the Jews. The Muslims then took over that Christian and still Jewish land that grew out of the crumbled Roman Empire. Now the Jews have moved in uninvited, and the Palestinians defend themselves; but Israel is an established, viable nation potentially blessing the whole region, and the visible problem now is that this beneficent power is being attacked.

A key ingredient of this defender argument, which I am saying is implicit in the thinking of many people, is that the problem of who started it does not go backward in time forever. Nearly any nation was formed by unfair power moves. (Israel is about the only country formed by the deliberative will of two global entities.) But no matter how unfair the past, established power eventually resets the moral counter: We are in control, and we are ruling with the best intentions toward everyone. So if you fight us, *you* are the troublemaker, and we will resist you. We will keep the peace.

Palestine’s contest is not over who gets the resources, but who *dominates*. Islam by nature seeks to dominate its political space, and the Jews, though willing to work with the Arabs and still considering a separate state for them, are living

out a destiny that goes beyond their own intentions and seems to be delivering Palestine to them, as promised. That is, they may have been willing to share, but because the Palestinians are not willing to coexist, Israel is being required and empowered to control the whole land.

Some theists see this result as manifesting the sovereign will of God, as describe in the Bible's promises about Zion and Jerusalem. Americans see that divine imprimatur on their own good fortunes, although the "manifest destiny" idea is easy to hate. Looking at Palestine and global terrorism, these theists can see a world-wide demonstration of how "kicking against the goad" causes unnecessary suffering for those who could submit to God's power.

### *The Correctors*

The conservative or moderate commentators of the West are partnered with the Defenders but more explicit in their political and moral guidelines. They perceive the dysfunction of the Palestinians and global jihadists, the "blame game" being played, the failure of Islamists to take responsibility for their ills. The Correctors see that guilt is being transferred to Israel and to the West. They apply against the Attackers the Enlightenment values of liberty, responsibility, and non-maleficence, acting as coaches—well-intentioned, but smug—who could solve the problem if the adversary would only listen.

For many people, this simply *is* the political wisdom about the Middle East, but the difficulties of this approach are serious, though subtle. First, as with everyone, the position is used to give a sense of self-satisfaction. American Conservatives would be happy if jihadist terrorism went away, but if not then it helps them see clearly where evil lies, that is, *not* in themselves. These are not especially religious people, so the self-justification appears on the surface as normal human self-esteem. What remains hidden is how the Corrector strikes a compromise between his all too human grasp of autonomy and the transcendent power he recognizes as his tried and true guidance. God is on his team, so to speak. This impurity will lead to difficult choices when the spirits of humanism and biblical thinking become more clearly distinguished later in this crisis.

The present effect of the Correctors' limitation is that they are preaching to the choir and cannot engage the Islamists. As coaches, they do not know how to handle those who are not listening to their advice. In the real world of Middle East politics, the Correctors are those who push for a negotiated two-state solution in Palestine. The prospects for this are going downhill, and as of about 2012-13 this is being recognized in the press. But plans are still put forth that will *force* peace upon the region, enforcing it with outside peace-keeping forces. These plans are not recognizing the deeply rooted dynamic at work there.

Intellectually, the Corrector position is but the first part of a dialectical process. The thesis is the Enlightenment expectation of responsible and reasonable action, and from that position the antithetical refusal of the Attackers makes no sense. But the Attacker can see through the Corrector and his pretensions. Yet he cannot see where his complaint is leading him. Neither one knows the real reason for the Attackers' responses to Western power.

This interaction is clearly displayed in the writings of two major figures of the recent past, Bernard Lewis and Edward Said. Lewis, with his title *What Went Wrong?* and others, is the correcting wisdom of the West applied fruitlessly against the malfunctions of the Arabs, and Said is practically Ishmael himself. His heralded book, *Orientalism*, says that the Western scholars of the Orient, in particular of the Arab Middle East, are not really neutral scholars, but are imposing their power on the Arabs in the process of studying them. One of two follow-up texts, *Covering Islam*, argues that the scholars do not "cover" Islam as a reporter covers something, but *hide* it. Ishmael is not being *heard*.

### *The Excusers*

Coming against the Correctors from alongside them are the *Excusers*, the Liberal-Progressive and neo-Leftist currents of political thought in the West. They do *hear* Ishmael, in a sense, but not in a critical and therapeutic way, rather by joining into his dysfunction. Like the Islamists, they believe the West has carried out great evils that are the real cause of global jihad, and that Israel has unfairly moved into Palestine and carried out brutal acts of oppression under the guise of self-defense, which makes the Intifada, the rage of the Palestinians, excusable and explicable, even if counterproductive. But they do not see the root of the problem.

The Excusers justify themselves by siding with the Arab Muslims as victims. This seemingly puts them in the biblical role of bringing relief to the fatherless, and they could be helping the rich lords of the West to repent, but in fact they are pathologically dealing with their own guilt by transferring blame to those who are wielding power. Established power is imperfect, and it does need criticism, but Islamism and the Liberal-Left are manifesting the guilt of the fallen human state, not in recognition and repentance, but in blame toward everyone in power, especially the Judeo-Christian tradition.

There is more to say about the Excusers, because they participate in the religious dysfunction we are exploring, and because their friendliness toward the Islamist cause is as great a mystery to the world as the violence pouring out of the Middle East. Also, their resistance to transcendent power shows up in the West recently as a vocal anti-theism and antinomianism, threatening the civil liberties

Liberals have long embraced. It also shows up on the street, in the Occupy Wall Street movement and other anti-authoritarian currents in the West.

*Postmodernism and Religious Pluralism*

The two philosophical positions named as I began are aspects of the Excuser mentality. Postmodernists are relativistic about the conflict and all possible understandings of it, and they see it as amoral, as the manifestation of power, with no guiding principles or explanation, other than this nihilistic observation. This philosophy supports the Islamist Attackers indirectly, because it tears down the Enlightenment principles of the West and returns us to a tribal point of view: there is no transcendent wisdom by which to correct anyone. One's own loss cannot be perceived as deserved, or as good when all things are considered—least of all as judged by Correctors of the West. Arabs have considered whether they have somehow lost Allah's favor, but for today's Islamists the blame lies outside their culture, in their oppressors. Any loss is automatically wrong; its only good side is to show better the evil of the West or Zionism. So this is an entrenched tribalism.

Postmodernists think we are all tribal, but some of us hide it well. Thus the West cannot justify its power as manifesting sound principles of reason or the will of God. It is just raw power and, from the losers' point of view, wrong. But Liberals are double-minded on this, not fully embracing value-free amoralism. Instead, they use relativism and amoralism conveniently, to dodge possible corrections applied to themselves or the Arab Muslims, but then take a pronounced stand against the power of the West and in sympathy with the troubled and suffering Ishmaelites. Being strong becomes a sin.

A clear example is Israeli "New Historian" Ilan Pappas, who has no regard for facts supporting one side or the other in the conflict, but automatically takes the side of the weak. Also Abba Eban and others have commented that young Israel was respected for a while as "David," but now is given the odious mantle of "Goliath." The powerful are being demonized.

The Excuser-Attacker team projects a noble sympathy toward the weak, and they claim to expose the sins of the strong, but nothing therapeutic is happening here. Palestinians are not being helped, and capitalists are on the defense, not about to repent, because Westerners can hardly be blamed for carrying on the business of society. We need to look more deeply to see the larger battle being fought by the humanistic spirit—guilty and proud—against transcendent power that forms the moral-political and economic-technological structures of civilization.

The second philosophical position in the Excuser mind set is Religious Pluralism, which holds that the religions of the world are more alike than different. “Many paths to the same God” is one way of putting it. Based on this, Pluralists believe that conflict is unnecessary for those *in the know* about these matters and exists only because of extremism and exclusivism. There is an elitist gnosticism here, by which the Pluralists justify themselves. But their belief is ineffective and has its own adversarial position in the conflict. Exclusivists are the enemy.

Religious pluralism is different from “political pluralism,” as I use that phrase. The latter is the political belief that all religions and all points of view on moral questions are welcome in the public square, as long as no one is hurting anyone. It is not that all religions and moral positions are equal, but that all have the equal right to be advocated. It does not require that “You can’t legislate morality,” but it does minimize the power of the majority to rule over the minority in religion and morals. This is the traditional American and Western view, best expressed by John Stuart Mill. It is freedom of thought and freedom of religion.

In such a world, all religions are welcome, as long as they are not harmful; they are free to argue for their beliefs and compete for adherents. Religious pluralism, as one of the many beliefs about religion, is welcome there, too. But religious pluralism today goes beyond claiming that all religions are equal to insisting that no religion is allowed to think it is better. Religions with exclusivist claims—most of them, and certainly Christianity—become outlaws. So it violates political pluralism. Islam would be an outlaw too, but we will see that it has a special status, and its exclusivism is more acceptable than that of Christianity, even when it practices oppression. The reason will come out as we explore the religious roots of this conflict.

Postmodernism dismisses transcendence altogether, and then Religious Pluralism throws up a tactical obstacle, as we try to explore these would-be transcendent sources that are going head to head. The core of Religious Pluralism is *subjectivism*: religious or moral positions are simply feelings in our minds, lacking truth value and saying nothing about the real world. So there is nothing important to learn about religious sources in the conflict. Coming from the other side, I will be making specific claims about how humans function and which religious ideas work for them—and about the result of religious efforts that are failing. But this whole approach is anathema to subjectivistic and relativistic religious pluralism.

Postmodernism and Religious Pluralism add their difficulties to this study and partly define its task. By looking suspiciously at the moral principles of the West and reducing them to expressions of power, postmodernism defuses the

critique of Islamism that is based on them. So there is no God's-eye view of the conflict that might hold the Islamists to account. Their endemic tribalism is encouraged, as they see the corrections of the West as power used against them.

But Muslims believe strongly in the transcendent authority and power of Allah in their lives. They believe they have aligned themselves with the True and the Good, that they are battling evil itself, not fighting for advantage. They may say that God is on their side, as we all implicitly do, but they more prudently think they are on God's side, in the same way theists in the West would justify themselves as *aligned with* (not *employing*) biblical or Enlightenment principles.

So are the Islamists tribal or not? Is everyone tribal? Are there two transcendent sources, two Gods? The Postmodernist will cheerfully dismiss all transcendent principle as the construct of a power-seeking human will, but short of such nihilism, how are we to understand the rejection by the East of the transcendent principles of the West, alongside the apparent devotion of Muslims to their God and his Truths?

This is the question of this book. The thesis in my religious psychology of the conflict is that Islamists are empowered by an "alternative transcendence." They are opposed to transcendence itself, as represented in the Bible and in Western culture, in Judaism and Christianity and, impurely, in the Enlightenment. They have made these things their enemy, and they respond tribally to the West's attempt to corral them in its explanations or expectations. But they strengthen themselves in the belief that God sees them and hears them in their weakened position, seeing them as victims, or potential victims who justifiably take up jihad against the infidels who threaten them. And in defending themselves they feel they are defending the world against evil.

### *Zionism*

The Master Narrative idea has many detractors, but Zionism offers itself as that Narrative, even while being one of the players in the conflict. No wonder, then, that Jews and Christians fall under suspicion. They offer the wisdom of the Bible, but it supports *them*! Defensive minds vilify that kind of leadership in general, much more when it says the Jews and Christians will win. Here we see how fighting the power of the West and Israel and resisting transcendent guidance are intertwined.

Zionism contains the divine expectation that Israel will prevail in Palestine, in the Promised Land. It may be expressed less theistically, as the destiny of the Jews, the outworking of a powerful message, or the moral necessity of a Jewish state. It is also the label used by those hostile to it, who hate the Zionists for moving into Palestine.

A Jew and a Zionist are not the same thing, and objecting to the Zionist program is not anti-Semitism. People in the West who hate what Israel does seem not to hate Jews. Some of them are Jews. However, anti-Zionism is recently being called “the new anti-Semitism,” because it is a wholesale denial of the legitimacy of Israel’s existence, and because it seems fanatical and impervious to reason. For instance, U.N. leadership is hardly able to acknowledge that Israel is the only democratic country in the Middle East, but sees it as the only one deserving censure. Something beyond the rational is at work here.

To talk intelligently about Zionism and its detractors requires that we explore anti-Semitism. I have found there is no textbook explanation for it—many ideas about how to recognize anti-Semitism, but not much consensus on what it is or how it works. Such explanation requires concepts that secular social sciences and liberal religious studies do not contain. I have already been writing about *guilt*, the driving force behind all of our explanatory self-justifications, but outside serious biblical theism guilt is a legal matter unconnected with God, or a psychological effect, a subjective reality that exists only when people have certain kinds of ideas. The reality of human guilt before God is not allowed as an element in viable theory. But this and other biblical concepts are needed to understand anti-Semitism.

My working theory on anti-Semitism is that it is the transfer of guilt onto the Jews because they are identified with Torah, which is God’s fatherly guidance for the human race. The Law is resisted because it shows we are guilty and dependent on mercy, unable to save ourselves from death, while the fallen human spirit is committed to self-sufficiency, including the ability to make itself righteous on its own merits and through its own strength. One way to feel righteous is to blame others for life’s difficulties, so we tell a story in which the bad guys are clearly marked out. The Jews, bearers of the resisted message, are in a vulnerable position.

Not everyone living in guilt is anti-Semitic, of course. There are other ways to remain reasonably comfortable while guilty. But in a recurring story over thousands of years groups of people have become suspicious of the Jews, for their claim of *chosenness*, for their adherence to religious law—even though Jews have not been proselytizers like Christians and Muslims—and for their industry, creativity, and overall success as a culture surviving in the worst conditions.

In particular, the Jews are despised as *strangers*, people from elsewhere, and going to another land. As “*Hebrews*” they are “from the other side,” or “from across the river.” I will argue below that their *destination* is a symbolic representation of how conscious human beings are being led beyond the natural life to a spiritual orientation, with a new set of values. The result in the affairs of

nations is that the Jews are subliminally perceived as not buying into humanism and nationalism and other large group associations, including the Christian religion. These affiliations are the way that humans normally orient themselves and feel secure, but at the expense of any outsiders.

Those not joining in cannot be simply neutral, but most be wrong, because the rightness of the favored group is built partly on the wrongness of the *other*. The Catholic's rightness is a function of the Protestant's wrongness; or, even more arbitrarily, the English get their self-esteem in part by not being French, and vice-versa. But regarding the Jews, a powerful logic operates within the routine distrust of the other; *these* others carry the message that this world is futile and condemned, which belittles the proud human spirit. And *these* others are persevering through their difficulties in a way that, if it does not indicate special protection by God, must be evidence of their collusion in some unnamed evil empire.

Even though most Jews in recent centuries wanted nothing more than to live undisturbed in the nations in which they found themselves, the Stranger identity never left them, and it aroused the anti-Semitism that gave impetus to modern Zionism. But once in that special place of their own, the Jews found it was occupied by their cousins, the Ishmaelites, who were not cheerfully moving over. This is not an accidental collision of the interests of these two nations. In the big picture, what the Jews are trying to do and the Arabs' resistance to it are subplots in the same story. Zionism is the Hebrew call to another world, another Source, while anti-Zionism is the human insistence that we have only our strengths and this world.

Anti-Semitism is a kind of racism, and we think of racists as pathological individuals, but I believe (following Israeli psychiatrist Avner Falk) that these are social pathologies, carried in the messages of society. Unstable individuals manifest the problem severely, while others are less desperate to prove themselves righteous by hating someone, but both draw their thoughts from culture. The moderate ones find security by siding with the weak and collectively distrusting power, especially the authority of the Judeo-Christian tradition. We need to learn why power of this kind is disliked so strongly, which is also why the Palestinians are turned against their Zionist neighbors.

Historical anti-Semitism is now accentuated in Palestine and the Middle East, also in the West's gathering distrust of Israel. Now two people groups bearing the names of Isaac and Ishmael are physically and rhetorically locked into combat. Their *stories* are doing battle. The idea that humans cannot meet their own needs is being attacked by the idea that we must meet our needs, as there is no other power. Put more religiously, the God of the Bible, who teaches total

dependence upon him, is being challenged by the God of Islam and every other human religion, who teaches that humans can please God through the practice of religion.

The Jews do not see themselves in rhetorical combat over self-sufficiency and dependency, because they are not living out the gospel, which though latent in their tradition has flowered separately in Christianity. But they are living out that issue politically: their destiny in the Promised Land is God's *unmerited favor*, expressing his sovereignty and power, just as Christian salvation expresses his sovereignty and power. The Arab Muslims oppose the grace idea in both Zionism and the gospel.

### III. Facts and the Stories that Drive Them

Most recent writers on the Middle East are speaking from one or more of the perspectives described above. The Defender-Correctors are presenting facts about the Arab-Israeli problem, seeking to show that the Jews, whatever their imperfections, are not the problem. Those from the Excuser camp and the Palestinians themselves are also presenting facts, but not so strictly, because they care for feelings more than facts. The Liberals and Leftists select facts that make their case for the evils of Israeli and U.S. policy. Noam Chomsky is the master of this art, showing the pain that U.S. and Israeli power brings, but without showing the provocations that give rise to punitive responses.

The Palestinians give themselves freedom to rewrite history to make it fit into their narrative, which is brewing on the streets. For instance, many have believed that Jews are told in scripture to strike out against Muslims, not knowing that these scriptures were written long before there were any Muslims. Or the case is made that the Palestinians are the original residents of Canaan, when in fact they are Arabs. And there is the murky question of whether Arab Palestine had any national identity when the Zionists began to arrive in numbers. In all these areas, facts are piled up, carefully or not so carefully, by the contending points of view, but none of them have any effect on those of the opposite persuasion. There is a great deal of preaching to the choir, as we congratulate ourselves on having correctly perceived the situation.

What we need is to perceive the narratives shaping the gathered facts, and then, if possible, the larger Narrative that puts these stories together. And we need to identify the religious doctrines being manifested. For example, I mentioned above that Bernard Lewis and his Orientalist colleagues were dressed down by Edward Said, who felt that Western scholars were speaking from power and failing to hear or understand the Arabs. This is the cry of Ishmael. Put out of Abraham's household by the New Testament judgment that human religion is dysfunctional, explained away by the Enlightenment judgment that they are not thinking and acting rationally, the Arabs protest that it cannot be fair for them to be held accountable to these Western ideas, which exert unwanted power over them.

The Orientalists sit in the seats of the establishment and feel secure. Their Corrector story is, "*Look how well we live, how our principles have served us. What is wrong with you that you cannot live this way?*" But the Arab response is that the power of the West and Israel is holding them back, and that Western "understanding" continues to exert harmful power over them.

The Arab attitude picks up and exemplifies a thread of thought reaching through all of history, in myth and literature and scripture, in the voices of Prometheus, Cain, and Ishmael, and in the struggles of the Romantics, Existentialists, and Marxists—to name a few. All of these complain that existing power is wrong and presses unfairly upon them. These voices rise against that power, and one way or another they call upon a god who sees things their way.

Muslims practice a straightforward religion of works, but they supplement it with a victim-based ideology. Because Islam is strictly law-based, and because of the political misfortunes of the Islamic Middle East, the Muslims are less comfortable than their Western enemies. The easy groove of moderate religion or secular self-satisfaction has eluded them, and the dysfunctions of legal religion are visible. This tempts them to blame the Jews and the West for their difficulties.

This is more than a temptation, because victimhood is written into their founding story. Muhammad could not win over the infidels of his family in Mecca and fled to Yathrib, which became Medina, the city of the Prophet. The *Hijrah* (flight) began Islam, because it formed the first Islamic community, defending itself against the infidels of Mecca, which is *jihad* (struggle). Following John Esposito, (*Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam*, 2002), I see *hijrah-jihad* as a combined phenomenon: Seeking holiness, you pull away from the infidels and then fight them in defense. But the best defense is a good offense, so if the community is threatened at its inception, then the justification of violence is part of the community's identity. The Shi'a-Sunni struggle has this character, too, the ones who *should have* won pull away from and fight against those who did. And this *flight* is in the story of Hagar and Ishmael.

Edward Said was a moderate, not a jihadist. But the *feeling* of Ishmael—“*I am under their power, but they do not understand me!*”—appears in his interaction with Western thinking. This is the weakened striking out from within the restraints of the too-powerful. Said has been criticized for deflecting legitimate criticism, and I agree, because his resistance is to power itself, to the legitimate and necessary structures of human society, represented here by the political guidelines of the West.

We look to learned professors for objective treatments of the facts, but here we find the feelings raging within their treatments. In a more recent and noisier example, Alan Dershowitz and Norman Finkelstein battled it out in academia. Dershowitz, a Harvard professor of law and a prominent defender of Israel, and Norman Finkelstein, a professor of political science and an anti-Zionist, both sought to show the real picture in Palestine. Dershowitz wrote *The Case for Israel* and others, and Finkelstein produced *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*. Both books bring facts and reasoned arguments, but to opposite effects.

In the process, Finkelstein accused Dershowitz of plagiarizing from Joan Peters' *From Time Immemorial*—a highly regarded and much hated book. Dershowitz lobbied against Finkelstein's bid for tenure at De Paul University. These experts did not resolve the issue for us.

Peters' controversial book brought huge amounts of facts (presented a little sloppily so the academics who choose to can scorn it) to the effect that Arab Palestine did not have a national identity before modern Zionism began. Instead, Arabs from surrounding areas migrated into the emerging Jewish culture and economy. Others have argued that Arab Palestine not only took on its identity of late, but garners that identity in a negative way, through resistance to Israel. In this view, *Palestinians* as we know them today exist primarily as the obstacle to Zionism.

All of this is a messy affair. There are facts to please every point of view. But if we look for the narratives at work, wisdom can appear for us. The claim above that Arab Palestine has an identity of resistance to Israel fits into the *Ishmael* narrative: he exists as the complaint that it is unfair for God to judge that human religion is wrong. "*How can it be wrong for me to try hard to be righteous?*" The critique of human religion is unknown within Islam, and the Palestinians do not see themselves resisting that judgment. But they see themselves as rightfully standing against the national power of Judaism and the harmful influence of the Christian West. So though they do not recognize themselves in this Ishmael story as the Bible tells it, their story about the harms brought against them fits into it. They are manifesting what the New Testament tells us about human religion: that it produces a guilt-driven defensiveness.

The connection between the present political struggle and New Testament doctrine is complex, and more so because of the peculiar position of Judaism today. Rabbinic Judaism is a human religion with emphasis on the proper rules, much like Islam. The messages of grace are hidden within Torah but not embraced in practice. Yet their destiny in their Land is a manifestation of divine grace, so they are living out in politics the message that God provides salvation apart from any desert on their part. That is, they have unmerited favor in the Promised Land, even while they do not yet believe in unmerited favor religiously.

It is these *Unmerited Favorites* whom the Palestinians resist, and it is these *chosen* Jews whom the world has been resisting for millennia, because of what they represent: the intention of God to bless humankind on his own terms without regard for human pride or effort, in order to humble us and glorify himself.

That distasteful message becomes explicit in Christianity, but it is integral to Torah, understood as God's biblical *instruction* to the human race: we are called to a life of *Spirit* that transcends nature, but in order to respond we have to accept

our wrong-headedness and impotence, especially that religion does not please God and has no solution to death. Humanism does all it can to avoid this conclusion. Islam is human religion, a kind of humanism, so Muslims tend to hate both Zionism and the gospel expressed in it.

The other prime narrative, the combined Defender-Corrector-Zionist point of view, is not looking at this Isaac-Ishmael story that I am drawing from the Bible. But they believe the Jews are called to this land or at least justified in the choice to go there; they see themselves defending all that is good and normal from strange and irrational attacks upon Israel and the West. And they offer their own political virtues as the necessary corrective to the dysfunctional responses of the Attackers. They, the Correctors especially, can produce many facts to show that what they are offering is good. But they cannot understand the lack of response from the other side.

The Correctors' limitation shows itself in the story of Esau. Isaac's first-born (the first twin) lost his blessing in a repeat of what happened to his uncle, Ishmael. Their stories differ outwardly, but both trusted in human strength and had scorn for things of the Spirit. Trying to please his father, Esau steered clear of Canaanite women but then married into Ishmael's Egyptian family. In a corresponding manner, the believers of the West see themselves on God's side, but they are compromised without knowing it. They have been unwittingly spirited off to Egypt. This means they are still practicing human religion, doing what they think is right to the best of their ability, thinking they are righteous because of the choices they have made, and comparing themselves favorably with those who think differently, especially the violent Islamists and their friends the Liberals, who apologize for the strengths of the West.

In the God's-eye view of this problem everyone is at fault. The Attackers and Excusers are fighting God's intention to make a name for himself by putting Israel into the Promised Land. The Defenders are unreflectively battling an unidentified evil and thinking they are better than the other, and that they will win if they persevere. The Correctors do about the same, but more intellectually, with more facts and reasoned arguments to make their case and win the battle. Even the philosophical positions of Postmodernism and Religious Pluralism, with their weapons of relativism and amoralism, are fighting against the God-given tradition of objective and impartial truth-seeking.

The Zionists, were they the pure expression of their idea, would alone stand clear of all these misguided agendas and *be* the Master Narrative itself. But on the ground, here on earth, we have Jews, Israelis, Christians, and moderate Liberals or Conservatives, all friendly to Israel or at least opposed to Islamist extremism, but mostly caught up in their particular kind of human religion, whether it be a secular

grip on Enlightenment faiths or some kind of religious practice by which they believe they are pleasing God.

The Master Narrative—unalloyed biblical thinking—tells us why we are so misguided in spite of our universal good intentions. That is, it tells us about *The Fall*. Consciousness puts us on a treacherous path from the beginning. Once we see why that is, we can examine the psychological maneuver that is allowing the Islamists to live within the special protection of their own brand of transcendence.



#### IV. Consciousness and Guilt

Understanding the religious psychology in the Middle East depends upon seeing the reality of human guilt, and that it cannot be removed by religion or do-good secular pursuits. Uncompromised Christianity makes the “Original Sin” and “Total Depravity” claims and separates itself from every other religion by doing so. This is an affront upon humanism, which naturally sees itself, from within moderate religions and secular world views, as everything good and hardly an enemy of anyone. Yet the human spirit goes to battle with the ideas of biblical theism. The resistance may be to the betterment of humankind, but that remains to be seen.

Religious Pluralism would quickly remove the sin and guilt idea, using its tools of relativism and subjectivism. *“IF a person believes in sin and guilt, then he will experience it, unless he thinks he has done what is required to remove the guilt. But not every religion teaches about sin, and there are many different ideas about what is required to overcome guilt. So what you experience depends on what you believe”* We have a choice here, in this view, and the humanists, secularists, Liberals, and many in the moderate religions agree that the world would be better off without the ugly *sin* idea.

Islam seems strong on sin and guilt, but its humanism hides in the expectation that we can remove guilt by religious effort. Muslims balk at Calvin’s “total depravity” concept. They believe Adam was teachable from the start, and that well-intentioned humans can be “rightly guided,” so you can be righteous if you are in the right group. But taking sides in this way requires the transfer of guilt to others, and ultimately the suicide bomber kills himself and others—in response to guilt that is not acknowledged.

The Liberal-Left camp does not believe in religious guilt officially, but bears down heavily on the evil-doers it sees. Massive political purges bear witness to a predilection for inflicting a deserved death—or perhaps a politically *necessary* death. Other cultural practices and messages of the Left teach that life is cheap, and they suggest that the human race overall deserves to die. The recent “Noah” film took up the extreme environmentalist position that we are a scourge to the Earth, a virus upon it. Noam Chomsky has cited Bertrand Russell to the effect that peace will come when human life goes away. So guilt is a powerful reality among those who do not believe in it.

Those who do embrace the doctrine of sin and guilt, but think that God has provided our redemption, value human life highly. The Church has done the anti-life things described above, but when Christianity is functioning well, human life is cherished. So it turns out that humanism turns sour and hates itself, while the

deep anti-humanism of the Bible, offense and stumbling block that it is, lifts humans up into a higher position, *not* worshiping themselves, but raised up by attachment to the true Good.

Again, all of this can be dismissed if religious positions are subjective and relative. But I propose that guilt is not an idea affecting us only if we believe in it, but a condition of human consciousness. It is with us from the beginning. I am not a Bible literalist, and I accept the scientific account of the origin of life, but I also believe Genesis tells us mythically how humans began in an *alienated* condition, separated from God and truth, committed to an errant value system that is doomed to fail. Genesis also shows that we are *defensive* creatures, bound by nature to attempt what cannot be done (make ourselves secure), but unable to see this about ourselves. We think we are strong and good, but our own power stands against the Good, or God. So we are unable to experience God and are lost in the task of trying to save ourselves.

I read the story of the Fall in Genesis 3 like this: Early humans lived in innocence, in nature, as animals, and did not have the problem we are exploring, but Eve—the females in a village of nascent homo sapiens—began to use language of a higher order than the signals the men were using for their tasks in hunting. The women directed language to self and others, rather than the tasks at hand. The women then became *conscious* in the strongest sense. Soon they taught their men to do the same, and in this way our conscious, remembered human experience, began.

This was a natural step, but not an evolutionary stage; it happened relatively quickly, ushering us into the fast-moving growth of memory and culture that is human history. It also gave us a new set of values and a new calling, not to survival of the species, but to what I call “*subjective survival*.” Our need in this new conscious state is security and peace in our collective subjective experience. It is about being *accepted*. Guilt is the opposite, and our dysfunctional attempts to set it aside do not meet this need. Biblical theism is the story of the struggle to respond to this new calling.

Continuing the scripture’s story, these newly conscious humans immediately knew they were naked, that is guilty. They put on clothing of plant material, which means they clothed themselves with what their skill and intelligence could make of the stuff of the Earth. They became defensive immediately, hiding themselves from God. When he accosted them and asked why they were hiding, Adam said they were naked (despite their fig leaves), and God asked how they knew. Had they eaten of the forbidden tree? Adam blamed Eve, but also God who had given her to him; she blamed the serpent who tempted her; God laid a curse on all three of them.

Thus the human race was born into the difficulties of childbirth, hard work in the thorn-infested fields, troubled power struggles in marriage and beyond, and death. My thesis is that all of this is the manifestation of human consciousness. That we are guilty and cannot save ourselves is the specific religious result of the advent of human thought in the newly arrived human mind.

Difficulties pop up quickly. Consciousness or mind is difficult to define, and if we are half clear on what it means it remains torturous to describe and explain. It is our biggest scientific and philosophical task, to discern the objective nature of subjectivity. The problem of *mind* is our consciousness trying to understand *itself*. Scientists and philosophers have in the recent past loved to explain it away, but our philosophical psychologists today take consciousness more seriously and are arguing hard about it.

A special difficulty of our time is that very few people, whether traditional or highly philosophical or scientific, will accept the historic view that humans are uniquely different from the other animals. I accept our common origin in biology, but I argue that we have passed a threshold and are doing something the animals are not doing. We are self-aware, consciously valuing things, and expecting death; we are religious, humorous, musical, and historical—all of which is true (to a significant degree) only of humans. This is the normal, traditional view of human life, and in practice we employ it still, especially if we swat flies and eat meat. But the tradition is under attack, because it is pre-scientific as usually expressed, because it is part of that ogre known also as Eurocentricism, and because Darwinism is more than a theory, also a metaphysics with religious implications. So it is *wrong* to think we are above the animals. Here we see again the guilt we are setting out to explain.

A theory of human guilt needs to consider how consciousness happens, then see its moral consequences, but in this brief glimpse I will mostly skip over the possible theory of mind. Yet we have here at least the possibility of a scientific theory of human consciousness that supports the religious claim that humans are guilty, at great risk, and unable to save themselves.

Let me first clarify that the condition of human guilt is *subjective* because it is *of the mind, of experience*. But it is not set aside by subjectivism: we all have it, not because we were taught it, but because it is a built-in condition of the human experience. *Feeling* guilty will vary with the individual and the culture, but the condition itself is universal. And that does not reduce it to nothing, because guilt has powerful effects and explains much of the trouble we see in human life.

The main biblical clue about conscious human experience is that the *fall* into consciousness is *knowledge of good and evil*. This is the forbidden fruit that advanced language produced. This clue helps us see the nature of consciousness

and how it began, but it shows also the moral problem: if we know good and evil *wrongly*, than our values are wrong, and we are in some kind of trouble.

Consider briefly the technical question of what consciousness is. We normally just use it and ignore the mystery of it: How did physical beings come to represent in their physical nervous systems the world around them and their own existence in that world? Consciousness or thinking is *about* something, or as philosophy puts it, *intentional*. Somehow in our brains the world exists *for* us. Behaviorists deny this or explain it away, understanding all of human experience as behavior, viewable from the outside. Intelligence is common to us and the animals, and intelligent behavior does explain much of both human and animal life, but we also have that special next step of self-awareness.

Language is the most promising possibility for an explanation. In the neurological manipulation of symbols—the remembered sounds of spoken words, to start with—in this physical process, something emerges that does not exist elsewhere in nature—*appearances*. We have *phenomena*—including the known world and the subject who beholds it.

This most difficult of problems cannot be handled in a few paragraphs of a fifty page book, but note one thing about the process: with enough complexity, in this most complex of all known objects, the human brain, *generality* becomes possible. Symbols are general, and symbolization produces generality. The world you see before you is full of *general* things. You could not recognize any of the buzzing sensations surrounding you if you could not generalize them, fit them into a pattern. Language makes this possible.

Closely linked with generality is knowledge of *being*, our own being and that of the things around us. When we recognize an object in the world we process the sensory data with a judgment that a certain kind of thing exists. We see what we have decided exists: “There is a tree.” Again, this depends upon language, upon responding to sensory data with words that *somehow* draw together the generality by which objects become knowable. This is the heart of the difficult philosophical and scientific problem.

Now we see the moral and religious features of consciousness, because knowledge of being is potentially knowledge of God, the Supreme Being, or *Being qua Being*—the self-existent Being of Moses’ burning bush experience. When we humans say of something, “It is,” we are linked to Being itself. When we say, “I am,” we are potentially linked to “The Great I Am.”

*Being* is connected with *Goodness*. Plato saw *The Good* as the creative, organizing source of everything, and Augustine saw in Plato’s idea the God of the Bible, who makes everything out of his goodness and as good in itself. From thoughts like these one could draw the conclusion that human minds are meant to

contemplate and enjoy the Good. *The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.* But consciousness did not begin on such terms, quickly recognizing such a *telos*. It began naturalistically, as an outgrowth of intelligence, which evolved as part of our genetic heritage devoted to survival of the species. These diverging goals are the root of the sin and guilt we are studying.

The need to survive set the agenda, and Eve took of the tree because it was “good for food”; but a whole new reality then came to life with a different agenda: to be at peace in the subjective world of human thinking. Subjectivity adds to the functional intelligence of humans, but it primarily introduced generality, being, and goodness, and these gave life to the contemplative aspirations of Plato and Augustine and other mystics. But the desire for peace in contemplation of unchanging Being is mostly thwarted, due to conflict with the urge to survive. We do not desire the Good, but ourselves.

Plato’s equation of being and goodness is blanked out by the modern scientific mind, which sees matter as value-free. But this is lack of reflection on our part: we have made matter a tool of our technological intentions, but without turning within to see the *motives* bringing this about. Lifeless matter is a construct of our will to survive. Earlier or less scientific cultures have not trusted technology and thus do not see the world primarily as the matter we are learning to control. More likely, they see gods they are trying to please. But these, too, are idols, constructs of the human will, ways to construe reality and its demands such that we know what to do. These are ways to see ourselves on the side of the Good, which strengthens us.

The survival need led to language, but language carried us beyond the values of physical survival. A simple way to put this is that we judge good and evil, but we judge them wrongly. We value our strengths, but none of them can solve our problem. All of us will die. Pleasures and the comforts of earthly security will fade or be snatched away. Reason helps us to survive, but reason also makes it clear that we cannot survive for long. So there is a judgment of futility laid upon all our efforts. This produces anxiety and meaninglessness—for what task of ours can really profit us in the long run?

We do more than judge wrongly what will be for our good overall; we construct subjective worlds of which we are the center, and we defend them. Pride is the protection of our perceived strength, including the collective strength of being in the right group or on the correct side of an important question. From this vantage point we feel we are okay, but against this fragile, self-built world stands the judgment of futility, the fact that none of this can last, that it is not our true good. We must hide from that truth in order to preserve our world. Our guilt is that we are hiding from our true Good.

Salvation is the recognition of the real and greater good that does not require our physical survival. Worship of the goodness of Being gives humans security, irrespective of their physical prospects. But no one can simply change over to that greater good, because in that transcendent value system the efforts of humans to save themselves are *evil*. To us, death and weakness are evil, and survival and strength and pleasure are good; but from this other point of view those futile value choices are sin—*missing the mark*. No one can begin to enjoy the transcendent good without first facing the wrongness of the natural valuations.

The constructed world built around the need to survive is temporary and faithless, unable to deliver on its promises, since everyone wants the impossible, which is to live forever. But the transcendent world that can replace it is *invisible*, until that other world bites the dust. “Biting the dust” is a good metaphor, because it means ending and dying, but it also suggests an experience of “eating dust,” an agonizing encounter with one’s own failure and foolishness. This is repentance, the way out of guilt; without it, we remain in guilt and defensiveness, and our self-made world blocks out the transcendent world that could rescue us.

My philosophical description of the fallen state needs to be supplemented by a psychological one. “Knowledge of the goodness of being” is too cool and abstract, when what we actually experience in life is first a supportive mother, and then a father, who may be the village chief, and who may be very hard to please. Vertical authority that overpowers us does not begin with doctrines and cathedrals but in the growls or approving murmurs of this stronger man. What we need is not to intellectually embrace transcendent goodness, but to feel accepted by the powerful people above and around us who raise us.

In the religious experience that grows out of these psychological beginnings, being and goodness have a personal face. Existence is personal, not value-free, except in that little window that is the modern scientific world view. At most times and places, people relate nervously or confidently to the supernatural person or persons they are trying to please—the Father within. Generally, one’s actual father deeply affects the supernatural relationship. There are great opportunities here for psychologists to explain away theism, as Freud did, by seeing it as a construct. But religious experience is not unreal for having these psychological roots. Yes, it is subjective, but all experience is subjective, and our experience of ourselves as approved or condemned is of primary importance to all of us. Some feel a personal God is smiling or frowning at them, and some think more abstractly of how they are aligned with the important moral principles. The rebel has his justifying cause, and even the full-blown nihilist has an experience of being okay or not okay.

Two dichotomies deriving from the psychological roots of religious experience make the analysis more complex, but also more fruitful. First, there is the tension between Earth and Heaven, or Nature and Spirit, as one's source of security, growing out of our experiences of mother and father. We have mythology and scripture and a little modern psychology to help with this. Prometheus called out to Mother Earth to protect him from an angry god, but Achilles was vulnerable just where his mother had her grip on him. The Father is the power *over* the child and sets the stage for vertical, transcendent authority, the Father God. This is important in biblical religion because the call of the Israelites is to leave the comforts of Nature or Earth in order to fasten themselves to the true security of Spirit.

A second dichotomy is between the transcendent authority of the Father, the *Vertical*, and the authority of peers and society, the *horizontal*. We experience this when we grow up and move from absolute trust of parents to our own adult points of view, becoming the next adult generation. To an extent, we reestablish the same institutional anchors, but historical change happens, too, as the culture grows with each generation. This is true especially in the second millennium c.e., when Western society developed a lengthening adolescence and a youth culture.

Progressives and Conservatives differ on whether such "progress" is good, and the tension between pulling forward and holding back governs the rate of change. But the long trend now is that we are outgrowing our allegiance to vertical, transcendent, fatherly authority—for better or worse. If biblical theism is true, this is rebellion that will not prevail. In our context here, what matters is that liberal, autonomy-seeing, humanistic culture is discarding traditional authority structures, and this is the fight against transcendent Power that I am attributing to the Excusers and the Attackers. It is becoming visible especially in this past century, with Nietzsche's "reversal of values," the reinstatement of human nobility. It is as if the child grew up and threw off all regard for the strength of his father.

The link between the anti-theism of the West and Islamism is not obvious, but the *vertical-horizontal* distinction helps us see the connection. At heart both movements are humanistic and thus find their values *in society*. Human religion functions horizontally and lacks contact with the genuine Vertical, even though most religions will see their nominal God in that position of transcendence. They will see themselves as correctly aligned with the Good and others as not so blessed, but the measure of that alignment is the standards they have created to suit their particular strengths. A likeness of God is being worshipped, and pride is preserved.

The best biblical picture of this is the Golden Calf incident: the *people* grew tired of waiting for their Lawgiver to come down from the mountain, and *they* told

Aaron—their powerless substitute teacher—“Up, make us gods, who shall go before us.” After Aaron made the idol out of the gold the Egyptians had given them, *they* said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 32:1-4) Real transcendence was not in the picture, the people were in control, and they were giving credit to an idol made out of the human strength they had brought from Egypt. This is horizontal religion.

Islam is not alone in calling upon a god it has constructed out of human strength. It is just a clear case, unmixed with the biblical message. And it is the one that is forcing the world to understand this problem, through the interminable Middle East crisis. We will see, in the final section below, how Islam creates its special Father God figure out of the material of horizontal, human religion.

In this section I have only described some theory that needs to be written. But even the possibility of such theory shows we cannot dismiss as pre-scientific or merely subjective the biblical claim about human guilt and its solution. To dismiss it at the start is to reveal what is being claimed, that humans are defensive. There is nothing implausible about the idea that humans made the transition into the conscious state with some very serious *baggage*, if you will, when they lost their innocence and began to know good and evil. We know good and evil *wrongly*, because the survival agenda around which we formed our values is displaced by reason itself: we cannot survive, and our efforts to do so are futile. We wrongly value the things which support physical survival, because our true good now is our potential knowledge of the Good, which consciousness makes possible. We mainly experience this through our need to be *accepted* by the transcendent Person of whose presence and requirements we have become aware.

## V. Cain's Complaint

If the newly conscious human race woke up on the wrong side of the tracks, wrongly knowing good and evil, naturally inclined to choose as good what is in fact evil, then we humans can be expected to do some serious *complaining*. This was not *our* idea. The problem of evil stares us in the face. If we believe in God we are conflicted about his goodness, since he has allowed us to fall into this troubled position. Or we believe no God exists, and the universe has no beneficent rationality or purpose behind it.

Most of us, most of the time, do not live in the face of this lost condition. We intellectualize the problem of evil and hand it to philosophers and theologians. We carve out a comfort zone through religion and other ideology—a way to believe that makes us feel we are okay. In some times and places we can paint a rosy picture of human life. But all too often the problem impinges on us in war, disease, catastrophe, genocide, crime—in whatever evil crashes against us with a power greater than our own. Then we naturally ask, *Why me?*

The human complaint is prevalent in mythology and literature, and in selected biblical texts, especially Job. In mythology outside the Bible, the human race is ambivalent about its powers, aware of the trouble we are in for seeking power, but glorifying human strength in spite of this. “Promethean,” as an adjective, glorifies humanity through him who stood up for poor humankind and gave us our strength. The stories leave it open as to who will win this battle. In the Bible, the positions are more clear: God has all the power, while humans try to cope with that fact. There are Promethean moments, like the tower of Babel, or the boasting of Nebuchadnezzar, but God responds powerfully against them.

The complaint of biblical characters starts with Adam. When God asked him why he was hiding, he admitted he had become guilty (naked) by eating of the tree, but he blamed Eve, and then God, for giving Eve to him. It is a natural argument: if Eve, seeking what was “good for food,” began to speak in a way that led to consciousness, and if she then shared that with her husband, well, he does have some excuses. *She* did it, and she was only doing what comes naturally, and *God* was responsible for her existence in his life, anyway. All of this makes sense, from the newly discovered human point of view. But this judging from our perspective is at the same time our wrong knowledge of good and evil, which got us evicted from the trouble-free garden.

These details and the ones to come are taken here as *revealed diagnostic analysis*. The stories are not literal, although the Tanakh does over its course merge with recorded history. The texts emerge from the written output of early

humanity as *scripture*, supernatural messages from a transcendent intelligence. The Bible is not alone in this claim about itself, although none of the others intermesh with history quite like the Bible. I will treat these stories as revealed truth because they show us things about ourselves that we would not be able to learn from within our lost position, except as these ideas break through our defenses, with much resistance and trouble. I hold the normal Christian position of *verbal and plenary inspiration*, which means the scripture is exactly what God intends it to be. This is essential to its diagnostic power, because it forces us to deal with each detail as it is, rather than setting aside anything that is difficult or inconvenient.

Bear in mind that I am looking back from a New Testament point of view, seeing the beginning from the end, understanding sin and salvation as Christians do. This, like all the positions I showed as we began, is but a point of view (Nietzsche reminds us). I believe it is linked to transcendent truth, but readers need not take that as a given. What I want to show is that this diagnostic analysis is fruitful, because it accounts for what we see in the Middle East.

Out of the garden, Eve gives birth to Cain, “with the help of the Lord.” She give partial credit to God, but his name suggests human workmanship—a spear, something forged, *to acquire*, so that she has *gotten/made* a man. The struggle has begun over who is the source, God or humanity. She then produces younger brother Abel, and very quickly these two act out the problem about human religion and divine provision. Cain offers to God the fruit of the ground, which is already under a curse; Abel brings the firstlings of his flock, a blood sacrifice. Already the “fig leaves” of earthy plant material have been replaced by animal skins that God provided for Adam and Eve, so already we are hearing about the futility of religious work and the need for divine provision through sacrifice. This is what Cain encounters, when his sacrifice is not accepted.

Cain becomes angry and depressed, but God says he has no reason to complain: he chose to approach God through religious work, and if he does well he will be accepted. Anyone who keeps the Law will be accepted. But God adds that if Cain does not do well, then he has taken on the burden of trying to defeat sin in his own strength, which no one can do.

Then Cain kills Abel, and when God asks him where his brother is, he gives history’s most regrettable rhetorical question, “How should I know? Am I my brother’s keeper?” So we see plain selfishness in the form of murder, but we also see the anger that human religionists feel toward those who trust in divine provision through sacrifice.

God responds strongly to the killing of Abel and tells Cain that the earth, already under the curse of thorns and thistles, will not yield its strength to him; he

will be a fugitive and a wanderer. Cain says, “My punishment is more than I can bear!” He restates the given punishment, without repentance, and turns it into a complaint against God: “Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will slay me.” (Genesis 4:13,14) The crime of Cain is that he trusted in earthly power, and the punishment is that the earthly power becomes inadequate; yet he cannot step into the realm of Spirit and enjoy God.

It is not difficult to read into this conversation the account I am giving of the human situation. Born in nature, but called to Spirit, we are wandering, separated both from the face of God and the power of the earth. We cannot enjoy transcendence, because our earthly values defensively rule out transcendent ones; but we cannot enjoy earthly supports and blessings because our conscious reason shows us they are limited and futile.

Cain adds to his complaint that in this weakened condition someone will kill him. Here God says a surprising thing that students of the Bible seem not to have ever figured out. The RSV text has God saying, “Not so,” to Cain’s worry about being killed, but others say “Therefore” and follow with a proviso about this risk that Cain is in. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him seven-fold. God then gives him the “Mark of Cain,” to keep anyone from killing him. (Genesis 4:15)

The Mark of Cain is taken as a bad thing in the biblical tradition, and yet it is a mark of special protection. Some commentary suggests that God gives the punishment but then moderates it. But a more unitary reading is that what Cain represents, human religion, will be in a strong position, not weakened, as history develops. Yes, the flesh will fail to bear the fruit of peace and security that humans seek, and God will not be visible, but these weakened, protesting humans will not fade away. Human religion will for most of history seem to be prevailing.

The seven-fold vengeance concept is reiterated five generations later by Lamech, who says, “I have slain a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:23,24) The fiercely protective human spirit is boasting in its strength. One could almost put these words into the mouth of Lamech’s ancestor, Cain, because the younger Abel “wounded” or “struck” him by receiving God’s acceptance, showing that Cain’s offering was worthless. Cain had a wounded spirit and killed his brother in a strange kind of self-defense.

That Bible scholars have not often gone this way is unsurprising, because the spirit of human religion has been mixed into Christian thinking most of the time. The message of grace and the “nothing-but-the-blood” faith in Christ’s

sacrifice has not been blotted out by human religion, which is why I can write about it now, but it has been clouded over, and it remains perennially unknown to the world at large. So a typical Bible scholar over past centuries would think of Cain as a clearly marked enemy of the faith, outside the Church, even while his church was persecuting or marginalizing those radically advancing the gospel.

Today, the lines are drawn more clearly. Practicers of human religion, mostly Islamist, but also communists and a few others, are killing Christians. They are also fighting Zionism, which is the political outworking of the Torah message. The strange public defensiveness of Islam, so often in the news, is the Mark of Cain in action. Criticism of Islam is taken as a *wound* to the heart of Muslims. Political measures are taken to protect Islam from criticism, and more desperate measures are taken, too.

A recent example, among hundreds of cases, is CAIR in the U.S. requesting the right to monitor and censor a television production thought to express harmful stereotypes of Muslims. The organization acknowledges freedom of expression in the U.S. but still wants to limit it. The entire “hate speech” *problem*—that we are hasty to see social criticism or moral positions as hate—is a manifestation of this defensiveness of the human spirit. So Liberals in the West inveigh against most traditional moral pronouncements and are treating them as crimes, while Muslims rule out criticism of their religion and society. In the worst case, Islamists kill their critics and those who “wound” them by turning to the gospel.

Cain’s complaint is first that his religious efforts are not rewarded and then, more broadly, that he is trapped between earth and heaven, unable by human strength to make earth safe or climb to heaven. He never considers repenting, casting aside human goodness and reaching out for divine provision, so his condition is terminal.

A more complete picture of the problem and its solution is in the story of Job, which is the *magnum opus* on the problem of evil. He was made a test case, to prove that humans can love God even when they suffer, but his losses seemed terribly unfair to Job. The solution to his argument about justice is that he submits to the power of God, who roars, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (38:4) When we humans require that God’s ways make sense to us, we are unwittingly *fighting* him. “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?” (40:8) In the New Testament, Paul hears us asking, “Why does he still find fault, for who can resist his will?” and chops off our human argument: “But who are you, a man, to answer back to God?” (Romans 9:20) Our shocked response to this strong-armed amoralism of God is a measure of how wrongly we see the world, how our natural value system is at odds with

transcendence. He is omnipotent and good, but his power often is not good in our minds.

Islam, with its strong father-figure God, does not allow Job's challenge. Job is in the Qur'an, but without the argument. "A good Muslim would not call God unjust," we are told. The Jews and their Bible encounter an unmanageable God on their way to worshipping him, but not without first seeing the depth of human sin, while Muslims and the Qur'an avoid this with a quick obedience. But without the agonizing discussion there is no repentance. Humans need to *wrestle* with God, which is how Jacob got his new name, *Israel—He who wrestles with God and man and prevails*. (Genesis 32:28)

*Ishmael* has a special name, too, "*God Hears*," so it would be easy to surmise that God hears or will hear his cry, which is his form of the human complaint and also the complaint of Islamism against God's intentions in Israel. But it would be an odd result if anti-Zionism were vindicated by the Bible. What is happening is more complicated.

God will hear the human complaint, and the Ishmaelims play a key role in that human experience, but that does not mean Islamism will be vindicated. Instead, Islamism is the manifestation of the human problem, the acting out of what the human race has never been able to see, which Islam and Islamism do not see, either. Their acting out brings this to the attention of humankind, because we have this political problem no one understands. No theory not informed by the biblical concept of sin can make sense of the Middle East conflict. So God's "hearing" of the complaint is not vindication, but therapeutic diagnosis.

The cry of *Ishmael* manifested in the anti-Zionist agenda is energized by the fact that Islam has not joined into Job's argument with God over justice, so the pain works beneath the surface. The perceived amorality of God is meant to crash into the human spirit and cause a crushing encounter with sin. We recognize that our values are turned backwards from God's. From this weakened place humans can be redeemed. But Islam, along with almost every religion in practice, is not bold to go there. Instead it assures us that God is righteous, and any good person will know that and keep his feelings to himself. This is human religion, in which God is not especially holy—not too radical, but manageable—and humans are reasonably righteous.

Even though this looks like a peaceful kind of compromise, it fails to address the real issue, and thus a great unspent energy labors in the religious practices and politics of the region. Redemption does not happen, pride and guilt are retained, and guilt is transformed into blame and directed onto the Zionists, the Jews, the Christians, and the West.



## VI. The Cry of Ishmael

To this point, I have used Bible narrative to illustrate Jewish and Christian doctrine that came from these stories and related teachings. The fallenness of humanity, the necessity of blood sacrifice to restore humans to fellowship with God, and the resistance of the human spirit to this avenue of salvation are all on display. The human way of trying to survive is at odds with the divine way of providing salvation. Human religion battles the divine plan—Zionism and the gospel—from a position of weakness, but with a resilient strength, too. That tension of weak and strong produces the *Complaint*: *It should not be wrong* for humans to rely on their strengths! The earthly value system protests to the heavenly one.

In what remains here, I see Genesis doing more than illustrating doctrine, because the narrative takes on flesh. Religious issues are operating in history. Actual people groups, the Arabs and the Jews, identify with Abraham's two sons. The Arabs see themselves and their Prophet, Muhammad, as descendants of Abraham's first son, Ishmael. They believe the Bible was distorted by the Jews, but many of its people and stories are in the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition, with modifications like the different view of Job mentioned above. The story of Hagar and Ishmael is in their tradition, even acted out each year at the Hajj. They take the story in a different direction, vindicating Ishmael and having him and Abraham rebuild together the Ka'bah at Mecca.

The biblical account begins with Abraham and Sarah (Abram and Sarai) dealing with infertility and the promise that Abraham would have many descendants. Sarah proposes that God might give her a child through her Egyptian servant, Hagar, so Abraham takes her as wife and she becomes pregnant. The standard Christian gloss on this is that he and Sarah had the promise but did not wait for it, instead acting in human strength to meet the need. So Ishmael is the result of Abraham's misplaced faith.

As soon as Hagar is pregnant, she has contempt for her mistress. Nature (human power) is boasting over Spirit (divine promise), which at that point looks weak and barren. Sarah blames Abraham, and he passively gives her leave to deal with her servant as she pleases. So she mistreats Hagar, who then runs away.

The angel of God meets Hagar in the wilderness and asks her, "Where are you coming from, and where are you going?" Think of Torah saying to the human spirit, and to the Arabs Muslims in particular, *What are you reacting against, and where is this rebellion taking you?* After her explanation, he instructs her to return to her mistress and submit to her. He then says she will have countless descendants and says the child within her will be called *Ishmael*, which means

“God hears”—“because the LORD has given heed to your affliction.” But he also prophesies that the people of Ishmael will be a fractious lot, living “to the East of” or “in the face of” their brethren. (Genesis 16:1-12)

Thirteen years after Ishmael is born, God again promises Abraham a son for him and Sarah in their old age, the child of Promise. Abraham is not completely happy to hear this, saying, “Oh, that Ishmael might live in your sight!” (17:18) He is invested in the fruit of his human efforts, his first son. But Isaac—“Laughter”—is born, and at the feast when he is weaned, Ishmael is seen mocking Isaac. The contempt Hagar had for barren Sarai has reappeared in her son. Sarah goes on the defense and says to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” (21:8-10)

These are the words Paul applies figuratively in Galatians 4, as he is defending the new gospel community against the encroachment of legalism coming from the Jewish establishment.

Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;  
break forth and shout, you who are not in travail;  
for the children of the desolate one are many more  
than the children of her that is married.”

Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. But what does the scripture say? “Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. (Galatians 4:21-31)

The “casting out” is the rejection by the Spirit of the human way of seeking salvation and spiritual growth. In the story, Abraham had already shown reluctance to have Ishmael (his effort) replaced by Isaac (God’s promise), and so

he also recoiled at the thought of putting Hagar and her son out of the household. But God encouraged him to do as Sarah asked, because the promise is with Isaac, adding that Ishmael will also become a great nation.

Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael off with some bread and water, and they wander in the wilderness and are about to perish, until God intervenes—hearing Ishmael’s cry—and opens Hagar’s eyes to see a well. She drinks of it and gives some to Ishmael, and they are restored. God states again that Ishmael will become a great nation. He grows up in the wilderness and becomes an archer, and his mother gets him an Egyptian wife. (21:11-20)

At this point scripture seems to be showing both the biblical criticism of human religion and the vindication of that same power. The child “born of the flesh” was expelled, but God showed mercies toward Hagar and her son and gave them a future. Now two large people groups have grown up on the two shoulders of this account. Jews see Isaac and his progeny prevailing in the Land, but the Arab Muslims see God’s favor toward Ishmael in the great kingdom they are trying to preserve. And despite the teaching about the futility of human religion, Islam teaches salvation by works and resists the Judeo-Christian messages.

The story has become two stories. We have a revealed diagnosis and then, also revealed in the text, a dysfunctional response to that diagnosis, which becomes its own story, missing the correction. All of this is understood to varying degrees by the groups involved.

The Jews deeply connect with their calling in Zion, and they know who the Ishmaelims are, but they have not fully processed their own criticism of human religion that lies within Torah and the Zionist story. The Christians have perfected that divine criticism in their documents, but often miss it in practice. Neither Jews nor Christians are much aware of the meta-criticism I am writing about, the diagnosis of how Islam is rejecting the diagnosis.

Islam’s handling of the revealed criticism is complex. The Bible teaches that human religion is not acceptable to God and illustrates this with Ishmael’s expulsion by Abraham. Islam is a human religion thus being rejected, but of course the Muslims do not think this about themselves. They see their religion rescuing the truth from the clutches of the Jews. Looking closely, though, we can see them hijacking the story for their own purpose, to avoid the verdict that God struck against human religion. The Ishmael story is a big part of their identity, but it is not read as therapeutic criticism. So the text diagnoses the problem of human religion, but it also shows how the Arabs Muslims will reject that diagnosis, how they will respond to their *rejection*—which is what we see on the painful world scene today.

Putting this into political terms, we have Jewish-Israeli Zionism, impure but divinely guided, following the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and

we have Arab Muslim resistance to Zionism, acting out what was prophesied about Ishmael, but operating in the strength of their defense against God's judgment. It is the psychology of this defensive move that we need to examine.

Most readings of the stories in Genesis 16 and 21 blandly smooth them over, seeing that Hagar is treated mercifully by God, and that she and Ishmael are saved from death and vindicated. If the Bible says nothing more than that, then naturally Islam can supplement it with beliefs and rituals that celebrate Hagar and the civilization that grew up in her lap, led by Ishmael, since "God was with the lad, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow." (21:20)

Thinking this way, then, we might conclude that the only Master Narrative in the Bible is, "To each his own." Jews will do their thing, and Arabs will do theirs. The interminable conflict? *We shall have to require that they forget their differences and be nice.* But a terrible energy lies within these differences, the anger of Cain, and Genesis does not smooth it over. We need to look more closely at the text.

Hagar's response to what the angel said—about 25 words in Genesis 16:13—is the springboard of this little book and the 400 page book that preceded it. Almost all treatments of this passage see it as an example of a gracious God, moderating punishment as needed, and in this case giving favor to a woman, a slave, and an Egyptian, even though Egypt functions symbolically as the repository of sinful human strength. Hagar is privileged to see God and yet live, which puts her in company with Moses and Jacob and a few others. But such treatments miss the more interesting idea—the revealed diagnostic criticism—that the Holy Spirit has encoded in this narrative.

Two things led me to a sharp turn here, not seeing Hagar so innocently. One is that the verse at hand, Genesis 16:13, is almost untranslatable. We read,

"Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees"; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?" (NASB 1995)

The New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh says the Hebrew is uncertain, and it leaves untranslated the Hebrew *El Roi*, noting that it "apparently" means "God of seeing." Hagar's explanation of the name is extremely problematic for translators. The NASB reading given here is awkward, and the "literal" readings in its notes are more so. The many other translations give an outstanding assortment of attempts at a clear statement. This seems to be a flash of static in the biblical revelation. As one who believes the Spirit is directing every pen stroke, I think

this unusual result has its own special meaning, regarding the state that Hagar was in and the historical import of this text.

The second reason I take a negative view of Hagar's relationship with God is that she is the only person in the Bible who gives God a name. She "called the name of the LORD" *El Roi*. It means something like "God of Seeing." I found one scholar to confirm that she is the only one who does this, and no commentator I came across made an issue of it. But that is surprising, because in Judaism naming God is a very serious matter. To name God is to get some control over him, which means that is not really him, but an idol. If we have put a "handle" on God, making him into something manageable, then really we have *made* a god that is manageable—useful to humans in their self-justifications.

Moses asked God for his name, and he was given the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, otherwise known as Yahweh, and in some circles Jehovah. But Jews handle that Name with utter respect, and most will not pronounce it, using LORD or Adonai or HaShem (the Name). In English many Jews write "G\_d" out of respect for the Name. G\_d's answer to Moses' question was, "I Am who I Am," or "I Will Be who I Will Be!" It has a *hands off* ring to it. We cannot name him as if in doing so we had gained control over him. He will be who He will be.

For an easy comparison on both these points, think of Jacob, when he wrestled with the angel and won the blessing, being given the *limp* of the man touched by the Spirit. He asked the Angel's name and was corrected for even asking. He was given a new name, Israel, and named the place, Peniel—"for I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." (Genesis 32:30) But he did not name God. Also, even though the story is very similar to Hagar's, there is no difficulty in telling it, no translator's notes required.

Because Hagar named God *El Roi* and explained this with words so difficult to translate, I believe her response signifies a departure from the God of the Bible and the creation of a god who would vindicate her in her rejection. It was really God who queried her about where she was going and told her to submit; it was God who prophesied about the future of Ishmael, promising to "hear" him in some way at some time. But her response to those messages took her into new territory, creating the *alternative transcendence* that allows Islam to stand up against the messages of God coming through the Jews and Christians.

When Hagar named *El Roi*, the text adds that the well where she was found was therefore named *Beer Lahai Roi*, "the well of the living one who sees me." More literally, per Strong's Hebrew #883, "well of a living (one) my seer." Later, when Hagar and Ishmael were rescued, God opened Hagar's eyes to see a well, so that she and Ishmael could drink, and live. Islam remembers this as the Zamzam Well in Mecca, celebrated in the Hajj observance. So the *well* image has an important place in this story.

A well is a potent symbol in both religion and psychiatry. If Islamists see themselves as victims and find sustenance in that belief, then it works as a *well* for them, a *source*. A source can be healthy or unhealthy, like nutritious food or addictive poison. (I am told that Zamzam water is not very healthy.) Apparently, Hagar in naming *El Roi* was attaching herself to a new source and, since there is no repentance in this account, justifying herself in her running away. This is the general function of made up gods: to justify us in our alienated and rebellious positions.

Looking closely at the symbolism, there may be a difference between the God who “pays heed to” or “hears” Hagar in her affliction, and the god who “sees” her, especially when that the text yields words like, *I have now seen the back of him who sees me*—one of the tortured attempts at translation (see NIV note). The “back of him” idea suggests that we are seeing *rejection*, and the kind of attention sought by those who feel rejected. Her husband Abraham turned his back to her and his first born child in the desert. She believes that God sees her in the unfairness of her plight, but she has really *named* a god to do exactly that, while shielding her from genuine correction. This is exactly the *alternative transcendence* that is vindicating the fundamentalist Islamists in their rejection of the God of the Bible.

The *hearing* or *seeing* distinction applies especially to Ishmael, whose name is *God hears*. For both Hagar and Ishmael there is a genuine promise to be heard by God, which means that the whole human complaint—*How could he punish us for being natural, and how could our attempts to please him in the power of nature be rejected?*—will be *heard*, as Job was heard. But that speaks of conviction and repentance, which may be in the future for Ishmael but is not in his life today. Today we have this *seeing* problem: the holding up of an image under which Islam and Muslims are protected by Allah and not accountable to the corrections issuing from the Judeo-Christian West.

Possibly the seeing-hearing metaphor works better in reverse: we want our complaints to be *heard* by God and others, but we do not want our true position as rebel to be *seen*. But in this passage “hearing” is God’s promise to respond to the deep need of our complaining hearts, while “seeing” is the human invention: we want the whole world to see us in our misery.

I may be drawing too much from these two words, but there are other details in the story that keep alive a healthy psychiatric suspicion. When Abraham gives bread and water to Hagar, he also places on her shoulder her son, who is about 16. Well, *maybe* it says that; translators have mostly skirted around this and removed the anomaly. Some just attribute it to different biblical texts, making him an infant. Islamic sources see him as an infant. But this odd fact is in the text, read

literally. The Talmud suggests Ishmael was sick due to the “evil eye” of Sarah. In any case, when the two get to the end of their journey Hagar “tosses” the boy under a bush and turns away to not see him die. Translators soften again, and the NASB 95 Bible says she “left” him there but in a note makes it literally “she cast him under the bush.” So we are shown a surprising *passivity* in Ishmael. He is practically dead until water from the well and his mother’s hand will lift him up and send him off into his powerful but troubled future.

When she sits down and looks away, Hagar is a *bow’s shot* away. Psychiatrists take note: he will be an *archer*, perhaps trying all his life to span that distance and recover the mother love of earth, but finding that nature cannot meet his need, as Cain found that the earth will not bear for him.

She then begins to weep, and God hears the boy crying, and speaks to Hagar, asking her what troubles her and telling her to lift him up and hold him up by her hand, because God will make a great nation of him. Then God opens her eyes to see the well, and she bring water to Ishmael.

Hagar weeps, but God hears the boy. Translators and commentators try to fix that detail, for after all, if God heard the boy weeping then he wept. But the text itself has this disparity. It suggests to me that God does not respond to Hagar in her *God-sees-me-in-my-misery* mind set. He responds to Ishmael, according to the promise of his name, and he hears the boy “in his present situation.” (21:17, Complete Jewish Bible) As I said above, to be *heard* in this way is to have a revealing encounter with Truth, to be convicted of sin and cleansed. That is not happening today with the Islamic movement, except for a few being drawn into Christianity. Islamism and the religion of Islam are keeping on course. So God hearing the boy in his situation is a thing of the future. It is also an experience that Ishmael through his troubles is bringing to the entire human race.

When the story ends, Hagar and Ishmael are not parting ways. She lifts him up and holds him up *with her hand*. Translators like to insert “his hand,” but it is *her* hand—and the water of rejection from *Beer Lahai Roi* or the *Zamzam* well in Mecca—that gives him his strength. He becomes a great nation with that kind of driving energy.

This what we hope to discover, in this small book: what is the energy of the Islamists? What lies beneath their anti-Zionism and its power? Especially, how do they bring the force of a great world religion, with a very strong view of transcendent authority, *against* what Jews and Christians think is the plan of God? And what do they share with their unlikely bed partners, the Liberals?

Our search is ending here in the desert, in the symbolic details of this brief narrative in Genesis. Readers may find the symbols obscure and too subject to

interpretation. But I am not trying to set up anything new from just this narrative. The criticism of human religion is in Torah and made explicit in Christian teachings, especially in the Galatians interpretation of the two covenants. Warnings of idolatry are familiar ground, too. It is only the particular shape of this idolatry that is singled out here: human pride runs from the message that would annihilate it, but then conceives of God as on its side, as *seeing* what the whole world *should* see, the dreadful unfairness of this judgment against it, this *rejection*. The complaining-rejected Ishmael is crying out to humans everywhere for his vindication.

When humans complain that God should not rule out their efforts, they apply a human *should* against the divine *should*, and this indicates two values systems, two Gods. But when the human believes in a god who supports her and does not correct her, then the transcendent *should* becomes invisible, and only the human values are in operation. The god who supports the rebel has come alive, ready to give drink to the hurting mother and fill her son with his special kind of strength, which is the energy of the unhappy crowds on the streets.

It is plain that unresolved guilt is raging in Islamist fundamentalism, but it is harder to establish that the meanings of the Isaac-Ishmael story are actually driving the conflict. There is this teaching about human effort and divine provision, and, yes, these two identities exist, and the Bible identifies them as two covenants, the new replacing the old, which is fighting back. Yes, Islam is a legal religion, while Judaism is legal only on the surface, carrying the message of divine sufficiency; this shows now not in religion but in politics, as the choices of the parties in Palestine are delivering the Land to the Jews. But with all that said, are Muslims really fighting over the criticism of human religion?

Yes. We have to think collectively and see how the messages have taken their political form. The Arabs know that Ishmael was rejected in the Jews' writings, and the rejection lives in their ritual memory, along with their vindication from Allah. So they are playing out that battle ceaselessly. It is in their founding story of *hijrah-jihad*, and it reverberates in the sectarian conflict over who *should have* won when Muhammad died. We hear it in every complaint that cries out from the streets of Gaza, to name the most obvious place. They have been *wronged*—by the idea that God chooses to preserve the Jews in the Land. They are wronged by Enlightenment ideas that shackle them with expectations, and more so by Christians who say Muslims' human religion does not please God.

The first wrong was that God did not honor the human effort of Cain. The Story puts this early because such rejection is integral to the human experience as conscious beings. We do not know about it until we study the messages we have,

both human and divine, but we act it out. The energy of that rejection, part of the human psyche for everyone, has been brought out and made visible in the cultural development of the Ishmaelites. They are acting it out, all too visibly, but for the instruction of us all.

In our time, Palestinians fight because they believe the Jews are taking away their land. Prophetically, that is true, even though the Jews would rather split it up, because what Isaac represents is prevailing over what Ishmael stands for. The rejection of human religion is happening before their eyes, in the success of Zionism. In response, their religion says the *ummah* must control the whole land. Society must be run by the principles of Islam. This is human religion defending itself, and it has become the justifying cause for Muslims. Motivation runs high, as they hope for righteousness through jihad.

On the world stage, Islamists fight the West and the Judeo-Christian traditions, in part because of actual colonialism and oppression, but more so because the messages imbedded in western tradition radically confront the human spirit. The West attributes its success to those messages but holds them very impurely, so there is much in Western power to rightly hate. The Marxists demonized power, and now in the Nietzschean age a variety of rebels, pirates, and desperados—*jihadists*—are finding evil in everything established. Guilt has been transferred to power in general, because at heart the human spirit has always been blaming its troubles on God. When the New Testament declared human religion out of line, Islam sprang up in its defense, declaring implicitly that God had no right to reject our efforts. Now these two currents have come together, as the human spirit, both secular and religious, rises up against the biblical revelation and those empowered by it.

The political difficulty with this theory is that it calls Islam's God an idol. But all human practice of religion slides quickly into idolatry. Every denomination "names" its god a little differently, and Christianity is famous for hypocrisy, infighting, and violence against those thought to be in error. Nevertheless, in our time, Islam is openly practicing human religion and manifesting its dangers. Since it raises its colors so boldly and defends itself vociferously, and also because it has a surprising alliance with the Left and Liberalism, the time has come for the world to ask, *What lies beneath?*

I am a theist, and I believe that history makes sense. It is going somewhere. Even with its naturalistic origin, history became our living out of ideas, and this subjective realm has an immanent transcendence (if you will allow the phrase): not an old man with a beard on a cloud, but Truth and Goodness appearing to us,

writing themselves into scripture, to tell us what is and is not good for us. As those ideas take root in human life, they fulfill themselves in history. And so the Jews are fulfilling the promise that, *Not by might, nor by power, but buy my Spirit, says the Lord, (Zechariah 4:6)* they will stay alive and return to their land—*Just to demonstrate his power*. Seeing his power and glory is what human life is all about.

The Arabs are fulfilling their role in a more convoluted way: believing they are following the true God, but resisting his plan politically and religiously, and fulfilling scripture by doing so. They are not worse than other human beings, but *chosen* to manifest this problem in which humanity, committed to the defense of human glory, complains and cries out to God. When that cry is understood, and the blame is no longer passed on to others but embraced in ourselves, that will be the light at the end of the tunnel.