

YOU & YOURS ARE SPECIAL, BUT HOW?

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A meditation on Baruch Goldstein, M.D., beaten to death at age 38

Everybody's special, so Jesse Jackson was right in telling black children to say "I am *somebody*!" But what's to be said & done when my somebodyness comes up against, confronts, tries to occupy the same space as, your somebodyness? My people's, your people's? We can agree that (1) my/our/your(s.)/your(pl.) somebodynesses are good & necessary to good; (2) As gas expands to fill the available space, & (Parkinson's Second Law) work expands to fill the available time, anybody's specialness, by the original-sin law of hubris, expands to fill spacetime, so (3) Moral-ethical-social-legal controls, if there's to be any approximation of justice, must limit the expansions. This Thinksheet is about **religion warrants** for certain people's specialness claims--directly, Jews' & Arabs', indirectly, Christians'. Theological heading, election.

The three religions claiming Father Abraham affirm for themselves A.'s experience of being God-chosen, (s)elected, for a group-defining job on which they are "sent" (Lat.n. *missio*, mission). Alex. the Great left no instructions as to how his three major generals were to get along with each other, & their clashings defined the history of the "known" world for centuries: A. did not foresee the three peoples of "the West," & the three of us--Jews, Christians, Muslims--have been living together awkwardly on our half of the globe. All three (1) **agree** on A.'s election (Gn.12.1-3, 15.1-6 [his faith in the LORD "reckoned...to him as righteousness"]), but (2) **disagree** each with the others as to the particularities of our elections, God's calling-promising (covenanting with) us severally.....Since each those particularities are group-defining, no intellectual resolution of our disagreements is possible. What is possible, & prayerfully desirable, is an improved *modus vivendi*, a more amicable & mutually supportive manner of living together: "Children, fight nice." ("Children, don't fight" is unrealistic, could occur only with loss of integrity, for the claims overlappings are essential areas of the three groups' self-understandings, self-definitions.

1 Now, Father Abraham, Mother Sarah, & Son Jacob-Israel were buried in a Hebron cave (Gn.23.19, 25.9, 49.30, 50.13) presently divvied up for Jewish & Muslim worship. There, on the first day of Purim '94, a Jew slaughtered 40 Muslims & wounded 150 more. A member of Kahane Chai ("[Rabbi Meir] Kahane lives!"), he read the Bible with the Brooklyn-born (as he was) founder's literalism. A month before the massacre, he quoted Eccl.3.3 to an interviewer: it was "a time to kill." A few hours before he was beaten to death by enraged Muslims, he read Esther, the Purim text, to his children: A Jew, Esther, got a nonJew, Haman, hanged (7.10). Jews were authorized to "annihilate" in self-defense against those who "might attack them": they could "take revenge on their enemies" (8.11-13). Chap.9 is the bloodiest: "the Jews gathered...to lay hands on those who had sought their ruin" (2), & "struck down all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them" (5). "The Jews killed and destroyed 500" (6), hung all ten of Haman's sons (13), killed 300 (15), then 75,000 (16). (NRSV)

Wouldn't you think the Jews would clean up that story before reading it to their children Purim after Purim? Some of them want us to clean up the NT of its antisemitisms, but neither bowdlerization would be honorable to history: we need to read ancient texts in context, "considering (as we say) the source." As for the literalists (Baruch Goldstein, David Koresh), they do less damage than would-be bowdlerizers (righteously intending to rid scriptures of violence, racism, sexism).

2 Mass-murderer Goldstein believed that the LORD God had (1) chosen his (B.G.'s) people & (2) given them Canaan-Palestine as their exclusive-perpetual possession. One logical inference is that any nonJewish land claims, even all rights claims (even "stranger" rights) of nonJewish inhabitants, are invalid, & (derivative inference) Arabs should leave the whole of Palestine, including those who are Israeli citizens....How does all that grab me? If I were a fundamentalist Protestant, I'd drink it down neat, straight. If I were a secular humanist, I'd pour it down

the drain & extend the contextual meanings of "God does not play favorites" (Ac.10.34, Ro.2.11). If I were a Muslim, I'd quote the Qur'an that Ishmael was Abraham's first chosen, so the Arabs have first dibs on the land; & anyway, land once under Islam should, by God's will, always be under Islam (cp. Heb. *berith 'olam* eternal covenant). If I were a very liberal Jew, I might say that Israel's chosenness-election to be "a light to the nations" (Is.42.6) is impeded by religion-based Jewish land claims to Palestine or any part thereof, but Israel as a secular state deserves the diaspora's support.

3 So where do I come down? (1) With said very liberal Jew, except that as a **landless** religionist of transtribal universality (Christianity & Buddhism here being parallel), I must be careful in criticizing the other two Abrahamic religions, which have a language-people-land base. (We Christians have no language, are not ethnically a people, & have no land-connection such as Jew/Judah & Arab/Arabia.)....(2) Everywhere is now anywhere (with telephone, cellular phone, radio, television, fax, e-mail, modem, overnight delivery): place is of declining importance except for *Lebensraum* (Ger., room to live in). Communication as well as transportation are shrinking spacetime into local-is-global-is-local, a technological revolution favoring reduction of tensions by reducing the old tension-fostering factors....(3) While in the OT, God chooses place (city, temple, house) & thus premises, ie land, real estate, in the NT he chooses only people: his Son (synonyms: called, chosen, beloved) & the followers of Jesus, who himself chooses his disciples. People are self-portable & in this sense, ie as not tied to land, landless. Spielberg's 1993 "Schindler's List" is a true parable of choosing persons who, as Jews, are also of a people (whom he, a Catholic, recognizes when he prompts a rabbi to leave his lathe & lead the Shabbat service--a high moment of affirming humanity by transcending religion difference).....(4) The God/people-persons relationship transcends land, as YHWH ("I-Will-Be-With-You") is with Moses in many places & is dependable-trustworthy-faithful in leal[loyal]-love in spite of Egypt, Babylon, Calvary (Jesus' crucifixion), & Germany (Holocaust)....(5) The land, old (Ps.24.1) & new (Rev.21.1), is the LORD's.