
Emil L. Fackenheim

What sort of “Jewish state” should Israel be? To answer decisively, it may still be fifty years too soon. For a catastrophe has happened that Herzl never dreamt of, and for Ben-Gurion it had yet fully to sink in. However, Ben-Gurion knew there must be a Jewish state, and Weizmann judged it must be “now or never.” Too terrible had been the Holocaust in Europe, and too terrible Jewish helplessness everywhere else.

The decision “a Jewish state now” had been secular-religious. Without the secularists, the religious would have been waiting for the Messiah, alas, in Europe. Without the religious, secularists might have built a state elsewhere; but they would never have made it to the Land of Israel.

Two years after its founding the Knesset passed the Law of Return; had it failed, it would have been to their lasting shame. Another seventeen years later, Israel returned to Jerusalem. Others have compared it to the Crusaders

who came, left, and left behind ruins. But Jews came back to stay, and are rebuilding Jerusalem.

Recovery takes patience and time and, being short of both, Jews at one extreme forget their quarrel with God and lapse into ultra-Orthodoxy, while at the other they make Germans-extminating-Jews into a quarrel between “people” and “people.”

Will there be an end to patience, even in fifty years? Jews have returned once before and, had they not done so—had all the tribes been “lost”—neither Christianity nor Islam would ever have arisen. Perhaps one day the words of “Hatikva” can be changed, and “Jewish soul” can be replaced with “soul of Abraham.” The Christian God is God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; and when Abraham died, Isaac and Ishmael buried him together.

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