

Judaism, Antisemitism, and Holocaust

In this book, David Patterson offers original insights into the dynamics that underlie the phenomenon of endemic antisemitism, arguing that in all its manifestations, antisemitism is fundamentally anti-Judaism. Structured in a unique matrix of chapters that are linked historically and theoretically, his book elucidates the interconnections that tie antisemitism with the Holocaust, as well as illuminating the Judaism that the Nazis sought to obliterate from the world – an effort which, as Patterson demonstrates, is ongoing and which forms the basis of today’s antisemitism. Spelling out the historical, theological, and philosophical viewpoints that led to the Holocaust and that are with us even now, he offers insights into the basis of the hatred of Jews that permeates much of today’s world. Patterson here addresses the “big questions” that define our humanity. His volume is written for those who wish to have a deeper understanding of both the history and the current manifestations of antisemitism.

David Patterson is Hillel A. Feinberg Distinguished Chair in Holocaust Studies at the Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies, University of Texas at Dallas. A winner of the National Jewish Book Award and the Koret Jewish Book Award, he has published more than 240 essays and 40 books, including *Shoah and Torah* (2022), *Portraits: Elie Wiesel’s Hasidic Legacy* (2021), *The Holocaust and the Nonrepresentable* (2018), and *Anti-Semitism and Its Metaphysical Origins* (2015).

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Making the Connections

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For Jacob, Aaron, and Julia

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Preface

While this book is based on many years of research on Judaism, antisemitism, and the Holocaust, it is, as the title suggests, more a philosophical and religious reflection than it is a scholarly investigation, at least in the usual sense. If the incorporation of hundreds of texts and proof texts into an analysis is the mark of what might be regarded as “scholarly,” then this is, indeed, a scholarly work. It is interdisciplinary in its approach, drawing upon history, religion, literature, and philosophy. It is, in a way, the product of a certain frustration, namely the absence of a serious engagement with Judaism in the study of antisemitism and the Holocaust, when Judaism is what defines who the Jews are.

In my own work, whether in the study of antisemitism or in the study of the Holocaust, I have always proceeded from a premise that takes Judaism seriously. In fact, some readers accuse me of taking Judaism a little too seriously. I have discovered that not only is there such a thing as a *Judenrein* form of Holocaust studies – what I call Holocaust studies without the Holocaust – but there also exists the phenomenon of antisemitism studies without the Jews. These are studies that would reduce antisemitism to another case of racism or bigotry, offering up sociological, historical, cultural, or psychological explanations, all of which, in my view, ignore the *Eternal* in the Eternal Jew, what I call the metaphysical origins of antisemitism, which are rooted in Judaism. By *Judaism* I refer not to the cause but to the target, which is the millennial teaching and testimony of the Jewish people that the antisemite would eliminate from the world. This, I think, helps to explain the absence of overlap among scholars who engage the two fields of study while minimizing the Judaism,

the Torah, that defines the Jews. In each case many of us shy away from the teachings of Torah that demand of us a reckoning.

Hence, in my view, the need for these reflections on connections. One important feature of the book that sets it apart from others lies in the matrix of interconnections among the chapters. The four chapters in each of the three sections of the book are arranged in a parallel sequence, going from metaphysical origins to defining features, then from fundamental challenges to ultimate outcomes. This can be seen in the schema below by scanning the chapters according to their vertical order, from 1 through 4, 5 through 8, and 9 through 12. Because the chapters in each section are arranged in a parallel manner, they can also be read horizontally, going from left to right:

1: What Makes Jews Jewish?	5: The Why of Antisemitism	9: Philosophy and the Holocaust
2: The Stranger	6: Word, Blood, Redemption	10: The Assault on the Holy One
3: Exile and Return	7: Anti-Zionism	11: The <i>Muselmann</i>
4: The Messiah	8: Jihadist Antisemitism	12: The Recovery of the Name

The question of what makes Jews Jewish is tied to the why of anti-semitism, which in turn is linked to the philosophical categories of thought that contributed to the Holocaust. The status of the stranger is connected to the appropriation of the Holy Word and purity of blood that characterizes antisemitism; the assault on the stranger and on the word manifests itself in the Holocaust itself as an assault on the Holy One. The condition of exile and the return to Zion is the context for anti-Zionism; inasmuch as the return to Zion is a return to the Torah that “goes forth from Zion” (Isaiah 2:3), it is an affirmation of the dearness of the human being, which was under a most radical assault in the creation of the *Muselmann*. And the coming of the Messiah parallels the Jihadists’ eschatological vision, as the Jewish people are faced with a recovery of Jewish identity and of the Holy Name in the aftermath of the Holocaust. So this book may be read either vertically or horizontally, as indicated in this matrix.

Again, the book is characterized as much by reflection and exploration as by resolution and argument, as much by quest and questions as by

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explanations and answers. If I may turn even here to Judaism, we have a teaching that God abides in the *el* of the *shelah*, of the “question,” and not in the fixed formulas or ready answers that would settle things. There is no QED here, no *quod erat demonstrandum*. Fixed formulas and ready answers characterize the discourse of antisemitism that belongs to the absolutes of Jihadist thinking and that find its Final Solution in the Holocaust. Therefore, in keeping with this teaching from the tradition, my hope is that these reflections will be more unsettling than reassuring. For there is no encounter with the Truth that does not result in a disturbance of the witness.

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