

“Love the Stranger!”
Jewish Practice and Theology after the Enlightenment

Dr. Samuel J. Kessler
Blacksburg Jewish Community Center
May 3, 2017

From Moses Mendelssohn to Jonathan Sacks, the Enlightenment ideal of universal morals and ethics has upended the foundational Biblical dichotomy between Jew and Gentile. Over the past two and a half centuries, Jewish thinkers and community leaders, dedicated to the idea of ‘Jewish difference’, have struggled to reconcile the rabbinical urge toward separation with the modern pursuit of transcendental values. Who is the “stranger” in a world of universal citizenship and equal rights? How should traditional Jewish texts be read in light of changing moral values concerning such topics as the right to individual dignity and the fair treatment of all? What does it mean for contemporary Judaism to recognize an ‘Other’? Is such an idea still morally palatable? In this evening of learning we will examine texts from Mendelssohn to the present, tracing the history and theological engagement of Jewish thinkers with the concepts of difference, otherness, and universalism in the modern era.

Outline of Sources

1. **Torah**
2. **Pesach Haggadah**
3. **Talmud Bavli**
4. **Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem* (1783)**
5. **Adolf Jellinek, “Love the Stranger” (1862)**
‘Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’ What a sublime, blessed law! What a triumph here celebrating the Jewish spirit, which lovingly gathers all strangers around it! Strike out the law books of the ancient peoples; inquire of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Greece, and Rome; inquire of the Middle Ages, with their blood fanaticism; inquire of the present age, with its clever statecraft: see if [any of their law codes] contain the three words: ‘Love the stranger!’
6. **Gershom Scholem, “Jews and Germans” (1966)**
7. **Siddur Sim Shalom, “A prayer for our country” (2003)**
Creator of all flesh, bless all the inhabitants of our country with Your spirit. May citizens of all races and creeds forge a common bond in true harmony, to banish hatred and bigotry, and to safeguard the ideals and free institutions that are the pride and glory of our country. May this land, under Your providence, be an influence for good throughout the world, uniting all people in peace and freedom...
8. **Jonathan Sacks, *The Home We Build Together* (2007)**

בס"ד

“Love the Stranger!” Jewish Practice and Theology after the Enlightenment

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Source Sheet by Samuel J Kessler

Exodus 20:8-11

(8) Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy. (9) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (10) but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God: you shall not do any work—you, your son or daughter, your male or female slave, or your cattle, **or the stranger who is within your settlements.** (11) For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

שמות כ':ח'-י"א

(ח) זָכוֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ (ט) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלֶאכֶתְךָ (י) וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וּבְהֶמְלֶךְ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ (יא) כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יי אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי עַל־כֵּן בֵּרַךְ יי אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת וַיְקַדְּשֵׁהוּ: (ס)

Deuteronomy 5:12-14

(12) Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. (13) Six days you shall labor and do all your work, (14) but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your ox or your ass, or any of your cattle, **or the stranger in your settlements**, so that your male and female slave may rest as you do.

דברים ה':י"ב-י"ד

(יב) שְׁמֹר אֶת־יוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת לְקַדְּשׁוֹ כַּאֲשֶׁר צֻוֶּה וְיִי אֱלֹהֶיךָ (יג) שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲבֹד וְעָשִׂיתָ כָּל־מְלֶאכֶתְךָ: (יד) וַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה כָל־מְלָאכָה אַתָּה וּבִנְךָ וּבִתְּךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ וְשׁוֹרְךָ וַחֲמֹרְךָ וְכָל־בְּהֶמְלֶךְ וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יָנוּחַ עַבְדְּךָ וַאֲמָתְךָ כָּמוֹךָ:

Leviticus 19:33-34

(33) When a stranger resides with you in your land,

ויקרא י"ט:ל"ג-ל"ד

(לג) וְכִי־יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנֶה אֹתוֹ: (לד) כַּאֲזַרְחָ מִכֶּם

you shall not wrong him. (34) The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God.

יְהִי לָכֵן הַגֵּר | הַגֵּר אִתְּכֶם וְאַהֲבַתְּ לּוֹ כְּמִוֶּדֶד כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם
בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Pesach Haggadah, Magid, Ha Lachma Anya 3

This is the bread of destitution that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. **Anyone who is famished** should come and eat, **anyone who is in need** should come and partake of the Pesach sacrifice. Now we are here, next year we will be in the land of Israel; this year we are slaves, next year we will be free people.

הגדה של פסח, מגיד, הא לחמא עניא ג'

הָא לַחְמָא עֲנִיא דִּי אֲכָלוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. כָּל דְּכַפִּין
יִיתִי וְיִיכֹל, כָּל דְּצָרִיד יִיתִי וְיִפְסַח. הַשְׁתָּא הָכָא, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה
בְּאֶרֶץ דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. הַשְׁתָּא עַבְדִּי, לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בְּנִי חוֹרִין.

Bava Metzia 59b

It is taught in a *baraita* that **Rabbi Eliezer the Great says: For what reason did the Torah issue warnings in thirty-six places, and some say in forty-six places, with regard to causing any distress to a convert?** It is **due to the fact that a convert's inclination is evil**, i.e., he is prone to return to his previous way of living. **What** is the meaning of that **which is written: "And you shall not mistreat a convert nor oppress him, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt"** (Exodus 22:20)? **We learned in a baraita that Rabbi Natan says: A defect that is in you, do not mention it in another.** Since the Jewish people were themselves strangers, they are not in a position to demean a convert because he is a stranger in their midst. **And this explains the adage that people say: One who has a person hanged in his family [bidyotkei], does not say to another member of his household: Hang a fish for me,** as the mention of hanging is demeaning for that family.

בבא מציעא נ"ט ב

תניא רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר מפני מה הזהירה תורה בל"ו
מקומות ואמרי לה במ"ו מקומות בגר מפני שסורו רע מאי
דכתיב וגר לא תונה ולא תלחצנו כי גרים הייתם בארץ
מצרים (תנינא) רבי נתן אומר מום שבך אל תאמר לחברך
והיינו דאמרי אינשי דזקיף ליה זקיפא בדיותקיה לא נימא ליה
לחבריה זקיף ביניתא:

Moses Mendelssohn

JERUSALEM

OR ON RELIGIOUS POWER
AND JUDAISM

TRANSLATED BY

Allan Arkush

INTRODUCTION

AND COMMENTARY BY

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And you, dear brothers and fellow men, who follow the teachings of Jesus, should you find fault with us for doing what the founder of your religion did himself, and confirmed by his authority? Should you believe that you cannot love us in return as brothers and unite with us as citizens as long as we are outwardly distinguished from you by the ceremonial law, do not eat with you, do not marry you, which, as far as we can see, the founder of your religion would neither have done himself nor permitted us to do? If this should be and remain your true conviction—which we cannot suppose of Christian-minded men—if civil union cannot be obtained under any other condition than our departing from the laws which we still consider binding on us, then we are sincerely sorry to find it necessary to declare that we must rather do without civil union; then that friend of mankind, Dohm, will have written in vain, and everything will remain in the melancholy condition in which it is now, or in which your love of mankind may think it proper to place it. It does not rest with us to yield on this matter; but it does rest with us, if we are honest, to love you, nevertheless, as brothers, and to beseech you as brothers to make our burdens as bearable as you can. Regard us, if not as brothers and fellow citizens, at least as fellow men and fellow inhabitants of the land. Show us ways and provide us with the means of becoming better men and better fellow inhabitants, and permit us to be partners in enjoying the rights of humanity as far as time and circumstances permit. We cannot, in good conscience, depart from the law, and what good will it do you to have fellow citizens without conscience? *

“But, if so, how will the prophecy come true that someday *there will be only one shepherd and one flock?*”

Dear brothers, who have the best intentions toward mankind, do not allow yourselves to be deluded! In order to be under the care of this omnipresent shepherd the entire flock need neither graze in one pasture nor enter and leave the master's house through a single door. This is neither what the shepherd wants nor advantageous to the prosperity of the flock. Is it a case of mistaking ideas or deliberately seeking to confuse them? One puts it

to you that a union of faiths is the shortest way to the brotherly love and brotherly tolerance which you kindhearted people so ardently desire. There are some who want to persuade you that if only all of us had one and the same faith we would no longer hate one another for reasons of faith, of the difference in opinion; that [in such a case] religious hatred and the spirit of persecution would be torn up by their roots and extirpated; that the scourge would be wrested from the hand of hypocrisy and the sword from the hand of fanaticism, and the happy days would arrive, of which it is said *the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard beside the kid*, etc. The gentle souls who make this proposal are ready to go to work; they wish to meet as negotiators and make the humanitarian effort to bring about a compromise between the faiths, to bargain for truths as if they were rights, or merchandise for sale; they want to demand, offer, haggle, obtain by hook or by crook, surprise and outwit until the parties shake hands and the contract for the felicity of the human race can be written down. Many, indeed, who reject such an enterprise as chimerical and impracticable, nevertheless speak of the union of faiths as a very desirable state of affairs, and sadly pity the human race because this pinnacle of felicity cannot be reached by human powers. Beware, friends of men, of listening to such sentiments without the most careful scrutiny. They could be snares which fanaticism grown impotent wants to put in the way of liberty of conscience. You know that this foe of the good has many a shape and form: the lion's fury and the lamb's meekness, the dove's simplicity and the serpent's cunning; no quality is so foreign to it that it either possesses it not or knows not how to assume it in order to attain its bloodthirsty purposes. Since, through your beneficent efforts, it has been deprived of overt power, it puts on, perhaps, the mask of meekness in order to deceive you; it feigns brotherly love, effuses human tolerance, and secretly forges the fetters which it means to place on reason, so that it may hurl it back again unawares into the cesspool of barbarism, from which you have begun to pull it up.*

* Atheism, too, has its fanaticism, as sad experience teaches. True, it might

Do not believe this to be a merely imaginary fear, born of hypochondria. At bottom, a union of faiths, should it ever come about, could have but the most unfortunate consequences for reason and liberty of conscience. For supposing that people do come to terms with one another about the formula of faith to be introduced and established, that they devise symbols to which none of the religious parties now dominant in Europe could find any reason to object. What would thereby be accomplished? Shall we say that all of you would think just alike concerning religious truths? Whoever has but the slightest conception of the nature of the human mind cannot allow himself to be persuaded of this. The agreement, therefore, could lie only in the words, in the formula. It is for this purpose that the unifiers of faiths want to join forces; they wish to squeeze, here and there, something out of the concepts; to enlarge, here and there, the meshes of words, to render them so uncertain and broad that the concepts, regardless of their inner difference, may be forced into them just barely. In reality, everyone would then attach to the same words a different meaning of his own; and you would pride yourselves on having united men's faiths, on having brought the flock under a single shepherd? Oh, if this universal hypocrisy shall have any purpose whatsoever, I fear it would be intended as a first step again to confine within narrow bounds the now liberated spirit of man. The shy deer would then be sure enough to let itself be captured and bridled. Begin only by binding the faith to symbols, the opinion to words, as modestly and pliantly as you please; only es-

never become rabid unless compounded by *inner* atheism. But that *external, overt* atheism can also become fanatical is as undeniable as it is difficult to understand. As much as the atheist, if he wishes to be consistent, must always act out of *selfishness*, and as little as it seems to accord with selfishness when he seeks to propagate atheism and does not keep the secret to himself, one, nevertheless, has seen him preach his doctrine with the most ardent enthusiasm, become enraged and, indeed, launch persecutions if his preaching did not meet with a favorable reception. And zeal is frightful when it takes possession of an avowed atheist, when innocence falls into the hands of a tyrant *who fears all things but no God*.

tablish, for once and for all, the articles: then woe to the unfortunate, who comes a day later, and who finds something to criticize even in these *modest, purified* words! He is a disturber of the peace. To the stake with him!

Brothers, if you care for true piety, let us not feign agreement where diversity is evidently the plan and purpose of Providence. None of us thinks and feels exactly like his fellow man; why then do we wish to deceive each other with delusive words? We already do this, unfortunately, in our daily intercourse, in our conversations, which are of no particular importance; why then also in matters that have to do with our temporal and eternal welfare, our whole destiny? Why should we make ourselves unrecognizable to each other in the most important concerns of our life by masquerading, since God has stamped everyone, not without reason, with his own facial features? Does this not amount to doing our very best to resist Providence, to frustrate, if it be possible, the purpose of creation? Is this not deliberately to contravene our calling, our destiny in this life and the next?—Rulers of the earth! If it be permitted to an insignificant fellow inhabitant thereof to lift up his voice to you: do not trust the counselors who wish to mislead you by smooth words to so harmful an undertaking. They are either blind themselves, and do not see the enemy of mankind lurking in ambush, or they seek to blind you. Our noblest treasure, the liberty to think, will be forfeited if you listen to them. For the sake of your felicity and ours, *a union of faiths is not tolerance*; it is diametrically opposed to true tolerance! For the sake of your felicity and ours, do not use your powerful authority to transform some *eternal truth*, without which civil felicity can exist, into a *law*, some *religious opinion*, which is a matter of indifference to the state, into an *ordinance of the land*! Pay heed to the [right] *conduct* of men; upon this bring to bear the tribunal of wise laws, and leave us *thought and speech* which the Father of us all assigned to us as an inalienable heritage and granted to us as an immutable right. Should, perhaps, the link between *right* and *opinion* be too prescriptive, and should the time not yet be

ripe for abolishing it completely without courting damage, try, at least, to mitigate as much as you can its pernicious influence, and to put wise limits to prejudice that has grown gray with age.* At least pave the way for a happy posterity toward that height of culture, toward that universal tolerance of man for which reason still sighs in vain! Reward and punish no doctrine, tempt and bribe no one to adopt any religious opinion! Let everyone be permitted to speak as he thinks, to invoke God after his own manner or that of his fathers, and to seek eternal salvation where he thinks he may find it, as long as he does not disturb public felicity and acts honestly toward the civil laws, toward you and his fellow citizens. Let no one in your states be a searcher of hearts and a judge of thoughts; let no one assume a right that the Omniscient has reserved to himself alone! If we render unto *Caesar* what is *Caesar's*, then do you yourselves render unto *God what is God's! Love truth! Love peace!*

* Alas, we already hear the Congress in America striking up the old tune and speaking of a *dominant religion*.

ON JEWS
AND JUDAISM IN
CRISIS

Selected Essays

GERSHOM SCHOLEM

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meaning for the Jewish community itself, and which no one ever took seriously except the anti-Semites, who found in them an especially nefarious trick of the Jews, an especially conspiratorial note. For it was precisely this desire on the part of the Jews to be absorbed by the Germans that hatred understood as a destructive maneuver against the life of the German people—a thesis repeated indefatigably by the metaphysicians of anti-Semitism between 1830 and 1930. Here the Jews are considered, to quote one of these philosophers, as “the dark power of negation which kills what it touches. Whoever yields to it falls into the hands of death.”

This, in brief, is an analysis of what from the very beginning was a “false start” in the relations between Jews and Germans, one which brought the elements of crisis inherent in the process itself to an ever riper development.

IV

Where do we stand now, after the unspeakable horror of those twelve years from 1933 to 1945? Jews and Germans took very different roads after the war. The most vital segment of the Jews attempted to build up its own society in its own land. No one can say whether the attempt will succeed, but everyone knows that the cause of Israel is a matter of life and death to the Jews. The dialectic of their undertaking is obvious. They live on a volcano. The great impetus they received from the experience of the Holocaust—let us face it: the experience of the German murder of the Jews, and of the apathy and the hardheartedness of the world—has also been followed by a profound exhaustion whose signs are unmistakable. And yet the incentive, generated by their original insight into their true situation is still operating effectively. The Germans have paid for their catastrophe with the division of their country, but, on the other hand, they have experienced a material upsurge that has placed the past years in shadow. Between these two mountains, produced by a volcanic eruption, can there now be a bridge, however shaky?

The abyss that events have flung open between the two can be neither measured nor fathomed. Unlike many in Israel, I do

not believe that the only possible means of overcoming the distance is to admit the abyss into our consciousness in all its dimensions and ramifications. There is little comfort in such a prognosis: it is mere rhetoric. For in truth there is no possibility of comprehending what has happened—incomprehensibility is of its essence—no possibility of understanding it perfectly and thus of incorporating it into our consciousness. This demand by its very nature cannot be fulfilled. Whether or not we can meet in this abyss, I do not know. And whether the abyss, flung open by unspeakable, unthinkable events, can ever be bridged—who would have the presumption to say?

Abysses are flung open by events; bridges are built by goodwill. Bridges are needed to pass over abysses; they are constructed; they are the product of conscious thinking and willing. Moral bridges, I repeat, are the product of goodwill. If they are to endure, they must be firmly anchored on both sides. The people of Israel have suffered fearfully at the hands of almost all the peoples of Europe. The bridges on which we meet peoples other than Germans are shaky enough, even when they are not burdened with the memory of Auschwitz. But—is this memory not an opportunity as well? Is there not a light that burns in this darkness, the light of repentance? To put it differently: fruitful relations between Jews and Germans, relations in which a past that is both meaningful and at the same time so horrible as to cripple communication may be preserved and worked through—such relations must be prepared away from the limelight. But it is only through an effort to bring them about that we can guarantee that official contacts between the two peoples will not be poisoned by counterfeit formulas and demands. Already the worm of hypocrisy is gnawing at the delicate roots! Where love is no longer possible, a new understanding requires other ingredients; distance, respect, openness, and open-mindedness, and, above all, goodwill.

A young German recently wrote to me expressing the hope that Jews, when thinking of Germany, might keep in mind the words of Isaiah: "Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old." I do not know whether the messianic age will bestow forgetfulness upon the Jews. It is a delicate point of theology. But for us, who must live without illusions in an age

without a Messiah, such a hope demands the impossible. However sublime it might be to forget, we cannot. Only by remembering a past that we will never completely master can we generate hope in the resumption of communication between Germans and Jews, and in the reconciliation of those who have been separated.

*The Home We Build
Together*

Recreating Society

JONATHAN SACKS



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unintended consequences. But it is now counterproductive. It has encouraged segregation rather than integration. Instead of reducing differences, it has highlighted them. Undertaken in the name of tolerance, it has created new forms of intolerance.

Difference matters to me as a Jew, as it does to all those who care about their identities. We benefit immensely from the rich variety of cultures to be found in Britain and every other European country today. Each has its own style, grace, customs, cuisine, music and manners. Each has a contribution to make to national life, as did the Huguenots, the Irish and the Jews. As James Surowiecki showed in his *The Wisdom of Crowds*, the more open a group is, the more likely it is to make sound decisions. All-of-us is smarter than any-of-us. We need multiple perspectives, a plurality of world views. The idea that we should melt and merge and become some new amorphous hybrid is neither likely nor desirable.

The problem is not difference but what we do with it. Does it lead us to segregate or integrate? Does it encourage us to turn inward or outward? I have argued for *integration without assimilation*. That means seeing our differences as gifts we bring to the common good. But that requires a concept of the common good, which in turn means that there must be a strong sense of national identity, a felt reality of collective belonging. Lacking this, charities, churches and other third-sector institutions become pressure groups, representing sectional interests, not the common good.

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Integration means a conscious decision to undertake the work of society building. I have tried to show how this is best done. We need to think in terms of covenant, not just contract. Contract is about what the individual gets from the state in return for laws and taxes. Covenant is about the values we share and the identity we construct together. Freedom needs a society as well as a state. That is why we must find a way of renewing British identity. We need a national narrative; we need collective memories; we need some articulate answer to the question: who are we?

Covenant complements the two great contractual institutions: the state and the market. We enter the state and the market as self-interested individuals. We enter a covenant as altruistic individuals seeking the common good. The state and the market are essentially competitive. In the state we compete for power; in the market we compete for wealth. Covenantal institutions are essentially co-operative. When they become competitive, they die.

Covenants do not displace contracts; they merely address different

aspects of our lives. A society that is all competition and no co-operation is not a society at all. But a society that is all co-operation and no competition is equally not a society. It is a sect. On a larger scale it is a totalitarianism. Throughout history, utopian thinkers have dreamed of a perfect world in which all competitive striving is abolished, its place taken by harmony. That dream has led to some of the worst bloodshed in history. Utopias have no room for difference, and difference is what makes us human.

What then would a covenantal politics look like? First and foremost it would recognize the limits of politics and the importance of strengthening non-political institutions. Of these, the first is the family. Nothing more profoundly undermines the future of liberal democracy than the weakening of marriage and the responsibilities of parenthood – of fathers as well as mothers. Marriage, once a covenant, has become a contract, a temporary partnership for as long as the mood lasts.

How do you rebuild the family? Not the only, but perhaps the strongest force is religion. Judaism, Christianity and Islam all emphasize the family, in different ways and to different degrees. So do most other faith communities in Britain, as do many non-religious groups. They preserve a truth almost extinct in the wider secular culture: that our deepest happiness comes from the intimate grammar of love-as-loyalty, and that means placing a limit on the pursuit of desire. Religions change people. Politics and economics serve them. When a problem is technical – I have a need that you can supply – politics and economics suffice. When a problem is transformational – when it is not the world but we who must change – then religion or its functional equivalent enters the picture.

Governments cannot do much to strengthen the family, but what they can do, they should. Above all, they should set themselves to do no harm. Married couples should not be penalized by the tax system. The government should look at ways of making housing affordable for young couples with children. Today perhaps only faith schools are able to teach the importance of marriage, but all schools should teach the importance of long-term relationships of mutuality, fidelity and trust.

We must protect social space, by which I mean not only parks, public gardens, beaches and forests but also universities, professional associations, NGOs, charities and churches. These are neutral spaces where we leave politics and prejudice outside the door, like shoes when we enter sacred ground. Because they are neutral spaces, they heal. They bridge difference. They bring people together who would not otherwise meet except in competition. A society without neutral spaces would be like a city without trees, efficient perhaps, but ugly and ultimately unbearable.

I have watched with dismay as one social space after another has

become politicized, enlisted in campaigns to boycott this, ban that, protest something else. Quite apart from the fact that gesture politics usually harms those it claims to help, it also destroys the fragile bonds on which civil society depends: it harms the would-be helper as well. We must take a stand against this. It is frightening to see how easy it is to gain control of an institution and subvert it for political ends. Heads of charities, universities and the like must say candidly: politics has a place, but not here. Here we are engaged in something that unites, not divides.

Covenant is about the diffusion, not the delegation, of responsibility. Schools cannot educate children without help from parents and the local community. They cannot counter the effect of a ruthlessly consumer culture. If what children worry about is what advertisers want them to worry about – clothes, mobile phones, iPods – they will not be builders of a free and gracious social order. If public-service broadcasting becomes mere entertainment with a smattering of modish opinions, we will not have an educated, principled public at all.

Modern culture slices responsibility too thinly and distributes it too narrowly. If schools fail, it must be the fault of the teachers. If crime rises, it must be the fault of the police. If cynicism reigns, it must be the fault of the media. If there is no one else to blame it must be the government, or at least the prime minister. This is absurd. Environmental damage is caused by billions of acts daily; so too is moral damage. Covenant puts responsibility back where it belongs, with each of us individually and all of us collectively.

Covenant is ultimately about social solidarity – a particular kind of social solidarity that does not sacrifice the individual to the collective as in Plato's Republic, the French Revolution, the Prussian state, Fascist Germany or Soviet Communism. Covenants are made between free individuals who cherish their differences while bringing them as gifts to the common good.

Social solidarity used to be produced in the natural course of events. It is no accident, for example, that great leaps in social provision like the welfare state occur in the aftermath of war, for war unites a nation more powerfully than anything else. In peace I can ignore my neighbour; in war I need him to fight alongside me. Thereafter, we acknowledge the debt we owe each other. But that sensibility fades. You can't hand it on to your children who never experienced what brought it about. Peace brings self-preoccupation, and the longer the peace, the more social solidarity is at risk.

I have argued that social solidarity cannot exist without rituals and narratives, celebrations and commemorations, moments when we affirm our shared commitment to the values that make our society what it is. There must be moments when we set politics and economics aside

and celebrate our shared belonging. That is when history becomes memory, and anticipation, hope. A Britain Day, community weeks and citizenship ceremonies all have their part to play. National celebrations are important, but they will only be effective if they filter down into local events that bring people in neighbourhoods together across ethnicities and faiths. Local government, civic associations, schools and religious congregations should all be brought into this process.

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Solidarity has to do with society, not the state, but it would be absurd to pretend that the state has no effect on society. There are things that damage it that only governments can address: deep poverty in the midst of affluence, for example, or areas of high and persistent unemployment. These tear at the fabric of society because they mean that not everyone has access to the minimum conditions of human dignity. Not by accident were these the very things that the prophets saw as signs of social corruption: selling 'the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes'.

The same applies to the environment. Global warming, threatened species, air pollution, the over-exploitation of natural resources: these are paradigm cases of the common good at risk. But exhortation alone will never be enough to counter the perennial temptation to be a free rider. Legislative and financial measures are necessary and they will have to become progressively stronger over the years.

This only serves to show how deeply state and society are intertwined. Without the state, society could not function. But without society, the state will lack the public consensus needed to enact the necessary measures, especially those that have a long time-frame. Maintaining the balance between what government does and what we must do, is difficult but necessary.

Governments must leave space for the arenas in which social capital is produced. That means empowering charities, voluntary and faith-based groups. Some of these may need government funding: faith schools do. So do other institutions run by religious groups, from old-age homes to adoption agencies. This raises an intensely delicate issue: to what extent should a liberal state fund non-liberal institutions?

This is a political question, not a moral one, but the following principles suggest themselves: (a) governments may fund non-liberal institutions so long as they are purely voluntary – people have a free choice as to whether to enter or leave; (b) there is equal provision available elsewhere (state schools, non-religious adoption agencies and so on); (c) the institutions are based on values compatible with political (not moral) liberalism. These principles would, for example, have