



Different But Equal? The Paradox of Chosenness

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A. Jacob (= Israel/Judaism) vs. Esau (= Edom/Rome/Christianity): Never Equal

1. Genesis 25:23 (oracle to Rebecca concerning the twins jostling in her womb)

<p>[JPS:] “Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.”¹</p>	<p>שְׁנֵי גֵיִים [גוֹיִם] בְּבֶטְנֶךָ וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶד יִפְרְדוּ וְלֶאֱם מְלֹאֵם יֵאָמֵן וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר:</p>
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2. Hizquni [Hezekiah ben Manoah, France; 13th cen.] on Genesis 25:3 (exc.)

<p>and the older shall serve the younger -- Here it is decreed concerning Jacob that he will be a ruler to his brother. Rav Huna said, when Jacob is worthy, the elder shall serve the younger, and if not, the elder shall be served by the younger (Midrash to Psalm 9:7). Another interpretation: The younger shall labor greatly.</p>	<p>וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר -- כאן נגזר על יעקב שיהא גביר לאחיו. אמר רב הונא זכה יעקב רב יעבד צעיר ואם לאו רב יעבד מן הצעיר. ד"א הרבה יעבוד צעיר.</p>
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3. David Kimḥi (Redak) [Narbonne; 1160-1235] on Gen 25:23 (exc.)

<p>[Two separate peoples] shall issue from your body – as soon as they come out of your womb they will appear separate from one another in that one will be reddish with a hairy mantle all over (Gen 25:25) and the other like most babies. They also will differ in their activities when they grow up, as it</p>	<p>ממעיד יפרדו, משיצאו ממעיד יראה בהם שהם נפרדים זה מזה שהאחד יצא אדמוני כלו כאדרת שער והאחד כשאר הבנים וכן יהיו נפרדים במעשיהם כשיגדלו כמו שאמר, כי זה יהיה איש ציד וזה יהיה איש תם, וכן</p>
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¹ Are the terms רב and צעיר symmetrical, connoting relative age? Cf. Gen 29:26.



says: one will be “a skillful hunter” and the other “a mild man” (Gen 25:27). And they will be of different sensibilities: each one will hate the other forever.

One people shall be mightier than the other—they never will be evenly matched in power: one always will dominate the other....²

ורב יעבוד צעיר – there is no **את** marking the direct object, so it is problematic and does not clarify who will serve whom, viz, the **רב** [serving] the **צעיר** or the **צעיר** [serving] the **רב**. There may be a bit of clarification in that the subject is in first position in most unambiguous verses. For example, “water wears away stone” (Job 14:19); “water drowned fire” (Isaiah 64:1).

In this case the meaning is not clarified in the prophecy: sometimes the **רב** will serve the **צעיר**, as in the time of David; and sometimes the **צעיר** will serve the **רב**, as nowadays. The implication of the word order is that *most* of the time the **רב** will serve the **צעיר**, and thus it shall be after our return from captivity [in Diaspora]....

יהיו נפרדים בלבבות כי זה ישנא את זה לעולם.

ולאם מלאם יאמץ, לעולם לא יהיו שוים ביכולת אלא האחד יגבר על חברו לעולם....

ורב יעבוד צעיר, לא זכר עמהם מלת את שהיא מורה על הפעול. והנה הדבר מסופק ולא באר מי יעבוד את חברו, הרב את הצעיר או הצעיר את הרב, אלא שיש בו מעט ביאור, כי ברוב הפועל הוא הראשון אלא בדברים שאין לספק בהם, כמו אבנים שחקו מים מים תבעה אש

והיה זה שלא התבאר הענין בנבואה הזאת לפי שפעמים יעבוד רב את הצעיר, כמו שהיה בימי דוד ופעמים יעבוד הצעיר את הרב כמו שהוא היום, ומעט הביאור שיש בנבואה זו, כי רוב הימים הרב יעבוד את הצעיר לפיכך היה הפועל ראשון, וכן יהיה אחר שוב שביתנו....

² See *Pesahim* 42b with Rashi; *Megillah* 6a with Maharsha (also Steinsaltz).

4. Malachi 1:2-3

<p>²I have shown you love, said the LORD. But you ask, “How have You shown us love?” After all—declares the LORD—Esau is Jacob’s brother; yet I have accepted [alt. “loved”] Jacob ³and have rejected [alt. “hated”] Esau. I have made his hills a desolation, his territory a home for beasts of the desert.</p>	<p>אָהַבְתִּי אֶתְכֶם אָמַר יְהוָה וְאָמַרְתֶּם בְּמָה אֶהְבַּתְנוּ הֲלוֹא־אָח עָשׂוּ לִיעֲקֹב נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְאֶהֱבֶה אֶת־יַעֲקֹב: וְאֶת־עָשׂוּ שָׂנְאֵתִי וְאֲשִׁים אֶת־הָרָיו שְׂמֵמָה וְאֶת־נַחְלָתוֹ לְתַנּוֹת מִדְּבָר:</p>
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5. Redak on Malachi 1:2-3 (exc.)

<p>I have shown you love..., but you ask, “How have You shown us love?” – The interpretation is that should you say, “How have you shown us love?” wasn’t Esau a brother to Jacob? They were brothers, sons of Isaac who loved me, and I chose Jacob and his descendants even though they vex me and gave Jacob’s descendants the land that I had promised to Abraham and Isaac.</p> <p>I have rejected Esau – on account of his actions and those of his descendants, who continued to commit evil against Israel and rejoiced in their destruction and exile, I hate them....</p>	<p>אהבתי אתכם, ואמרתם במה אהבתנו - פי' ואם תאמרו במה אהבתנו הלא אח עשו ליעקב אחים היו בני יצחק אוהבי ובחרתי ביעקב ובזרעו אחריו אף על פי שהם מכעיסים אותי ונתתי לזרע יעקב הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאברהם וליצחק.</p> <p>ואת עשו שנאתי - לפי מעשיו ומעשה זרעו אחריו ולא רציתי שיחלקו עם אחיו יעקב בארץ כנען ונתתי לו לירושה הר שער ולזרעו אחריו וכשהרבו להרע לישראל ושמחו בחרבנם ובגלותם שנאתים....</p>
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6. Isaac Abarbanel [Portugal; 1437-1508] on Malachi 1:2-3 (exc.)

All the commentators relate “I have loved Jacob” to God’s gift of the land, and “I have hated Esau” to God’s removing him from his brother Jacob’s presence in the land. If that is the meaning, it is not mentioned in Scripture. All it says about Esau is, “I have made his hills a desolation, his territory a home for beasts of the desert.” In other words, for God’s hatred of Esau, God will perpetually ruin and devastate his land. This encompasses what was said when the brothers Jacob and Esau were struggling with one another, as the Torah revealed in the story of their gestation (Gen 25:22) which says, “the children struggled in [Rebecca’s] womb,” which means that they will perpetually be in a state of enmity and hatred: when one rises the other falls. Even prior to birth they hated one another to the extent that at birth Jacob was grasping Esau’s heel (Gen 25:26) to indicate that Jacob and Esau would always be struggling with each other. From birth the two had completely contrary and opposing dispositions....

והמפרשים כולם פירשו ואוהב את
יעקב לתת לו ארץ חמדת צבי ואת
עשו שנאתי לדחפו אל ארץ מפני
יעקב אחיו. ואם היות הענין כך לא
נזכר כן בכתוב אבל אמר בלבד
בעשו וְאֶשִׁים אֶת־הָרִיו שְׁמָמָה
וְאֶת־נַחְלָתוֹ לְתַנּוֹת מִדְבָּר כְּלוֹמַר
שֶׁלִשְׁנָאוֹתָיו אֶת עֵשָׂו תְּמִיד יַחְרִיב
וְיַחְרִים אֶת אֶרְצוֹ, וְכִלְל בּוֹזֵה הַמֵּאֲמַר
עוֹד שֶׁהָיָה עֵשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב אַחִים וְהָיָה
צוֹרְרִים זֶה אֶת זֶה כְּמוֹ שֶׁגִּלְתָּהּ
הַתּוֹרָה בְּסִפּוֹר הַרְיוֹנָם שֶׁאֲמַר
וַיִּתְרָצְצוּ הַבְּנִים בְּקֶרֶבָהּ לְפִי שֶׁתְּמִיד
יְהִי בְּאִיבָה וְשִׁנְאָה כְּשֶׁזֶה קָם זֶה
נוֹפֵל, כִּיּוֹן שֶׁמִּלִּידָהּ וּמִבֶּטֶן וּמִהַרְיוֹן
הָיָה שׁוֹנְאִים זֶה לְזֶה עַד שֶׁבָּהוּלָדָם
הָיָה יַעֲקֹב יָדוֹ אֲחֻזָּת בְּעַקֵּב עֵשָׂו
לְהַעִיר שָׁכֵן יְהִי תְּמִיד אָדוֹם
וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְקוֹטְטִים זֶה בּוֹזֵה כִּי נוֹלְדוּ
שְׁנֵיהֶם בְּמִזְגִים מִתְחַלְפִים וְסוֹתְרִים
בְּתַכְלִית הַחֲלוּף....



B. Dehumanizing the Other

7. Ezekiel 34:28-31³

<p>²⁸They shall no longer be a spoil for the nations, and the beasts of the earth shall not devour them; they shall dwell secure and untroubled. ²⁹I shall establish for them a planting of renown; they shall no more be carried off by famine, and they shall not have to bear again the taunts of the nations. ³⁰They shall know that I the LORD their God am with them and they, the House of Israel, are My people—declares the Lord GOD. ³¹For you, My flock, flock that I tend, are men [alt. “human”]; and I am your God—declares the Lord GOD.</p>	<p>וְלֹא־יְהִיוּ עוֹד בַּז לְגוֹיִם וְחַיִּית הָאָרֶץ לֹא תֹאכְלֶם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לְבֶטַח וְאִין מִחֲרִיד: וְהִקְמַתִּי לָהֶם מִטֶּעַ לְשֵׁם וְלֹא־יְהִיוּ עוֹד אֶסְפִּי רֶעֶב בְּאֶרֶץ וְלֹא־יִשְׁאוּ עוֹד כְּלִמַּת הַגּוֹיִם: וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲתֶם וְהִמָּה עַמִּי בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶאֱמַר אֲדַגְּנֶה ה': וְאַתֶּן צֹאֵן מְרֻעִיתִי אָדָם אֲתֶם אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נֶאֱמַר אֲדַגְּנֶה ה':</p>
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8. Redak on Ezekiel 34:31 (exc.)

<p>For you, My flock, flock that I tend, are human – When you become the flock that I tend with knowledge, understanding, and intelligence, then you will be called “human”, not sheep and cattle.... When the good that God intends for us comes upon us and</p>	<p>וְאַתֶּן צֹאֵן מְרֻעִיתִי אָדָם אֲתֶם - כשִׁתְּהוּ צֹאֵן מְרֻעִיתִי שֶׁאֵרְעָה אֲתֶכֶם דְּעָה וּבִינָה וְהִשְׁכַּל אֶז תִּקְרָאוּ אָדָם לֹא צֹאֵן וּבִהְמָה.... כְּשִׁיגִיעֵנו הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר יַעֲדֵנו הָאֵל</p>
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³ Ezekiel 34 is an oracle condemning the “shepherds” [=leaders] who have allowed the Israelite “flock” to go astray (cf. Jeremiah 23:1-4). By way of restoration, God will rescue the flock and appoint a new Davidic shepherd to tend them properly. Verses 28-31 conclude the chapter.



<p>the world is filled with knowledge of God and other good things and the intention to love and serve God wholeheartedly, and we preoccupy ourselves with the intelligibles, then we will be called “human”: the human component is recognizable and we are distinct from beasts and the people who are like them. Jonathan translated [the verse into Aramaic], “You are my people, the people called by my name; you are House of Israel.” Accordingly, our sages said, “you are human” means that <i>you</i> are called “human” but the gentiles are <i>not</i> called “human”.</p>	<p>יתברך ומלאה הארץ דעה את השם ושאר הענינים הטובים והיעודים לאהוב את ה' ולעבדו בלב שלם ונתעסק במושכלות אז נקרא אדם שיהיה נכר בנו חלק האנושי ונהיה נבדלים מן הבהמה ומן האדם הדומים לה וי"ת וְאַתּוֹן עַמִּי עִם דְּאִתְקַרִי שְׁמִי עַל־יְהוֹן בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲתוֹן. ועל הדרך הזה אמרו רבותינו ז"ל אדם אתם אתם קרוין אדם ואין עכו"ם קרויין אדם:</p>
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9a. Yevamot 61a (Steinsaltz translation/gloss *apud* Sefaria)

<p>The graves of gentiles do not render items impure though a tent, as it is stated: “And you My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men [<i>adam</i>]”, from which it is derived that you, the Jewish people, are called men [<i>adam</i>] but gentiles are not called men [<i>adam</i>]. Since the Torah introduces the <i>halakha</i> of ritual impurity of a tent with the words: “When a man [<i>adam</i>] dies in a tent” (Numbers 19:14), this <i>halakha</i> applies only to corpses of Jews but not those of gentiles.</p>	<p>קברי גוים אינן מטמאין באהל שנאמר וְאַתּוֹן צֹאֲנֵי צֹאֲן מִרְעִיתֵי אָדָם אַתֶּם אתם קרויין אדם ואין הגוים קרויין אדם.</p>
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9b. Sanhedrin 59a

➔ The distinction between Jews and gentiles in *Yevamot* 61a seems to be restricted to the matter of corpse impurity.⁴ The narrow interpretation of

⁴ Cf. Rambam, “Laws of Corpse Impurity” 1:13 and the more stringent *Shulhan Arukh* YD 372:2.



אדם/*adam* is called into question there and elsewhere in the *gemara*, esp. *Sanhedrin* 59a, where R. Meir counters R. Yoḥanan’s claim, “A gentile who engages in Torah study is liable to receive the death penalty,” as follows (excerpted with Steinsaltz):

<p>Rabbi Meir would say: From where is it derived that even a gentile who engages in Torah study is considered like a High Priest? It is derived from that which is stated: “You shall therefore keep My statutes and My ordinances, which if a man [אדם/ha-adam] does he shall live by them” (Leviticus 18:5). The phrase: Which if priests, Levites, and Israelites do they shall live by them, is not stated, but rather: “A man,” which indicates mankind in general. You have therefore learned that even a gentile who engages in Torah study is considered like a High Priest.</p>	<p>היה רבי מאיר אומר מניין שאפילו עובד כוכבים ועוסק בתורה שהוא ככהן גדול שנאמר אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם הָאָדָם וְחַי בָּהֶם כהנים לויים וישראלים לא נאמר אלא האדם הא למדת שאפילו עובד כוכבים ועוסק בתורה הרי הוא ככהן גדול.</p>
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10. Isaac Adarbi [Salonika (1510?–1584?)], *Divrei shalom*, Sermon 3 (Venice, 1586, p. 4a)⁵

<p>We see the idolatrous gentiles standing firm without the Torah. We say that the truth is that the gentiles,</p>	<p>אנו רואים לאומות העולם ע"א עומדים על תלם זולת התורה נאמר</p>
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⁵ Adarbi was preacher of the congregation of Lisbon Jews and later rabbi of Congregation Shalom in Salonika. *Divrei Shalom* is a collection of 30 of his sermons, first published in Salonika in 1580, reprinted twice in Venice (1586; 1587) and a third time in Warsaw (1893). The purpose of Sermon 3, summarized on p. 164b, is to demonstrate that the Torah is “essential” (rather than “accidental”) to humanity. The sermon was omitted from the Warsaw edition without explanation. See Shaul Regev, “R. Isaac Aderbi’s ‘Divrei Shalom’: Between Venice and Warsaw Editions [in Hebrew],” *Alei Sefer* 23 (2013), pp. 51-62.



since they do not have the light of Torah, are not called “human,” as the sages said on the verse, “For you, My flock, flock that I tend, are human” (Ezekiel 34:31): *you* are called “human” and the gentiles are not called “human.” The intention is to say that since some sheep are intended for slaughter and others to produce wool, milk, and offspring, it says, “I tend *my* flock”—not the sheep intended for slaughter but “the flock that *I* tend.” In other words, the one that provides my livelihood, not for slaughter but for sustenance, since Israel sustains the Holy One, as it were....

One who is termed “human” must possess this Torah on account of which a person is called “human.” Since the gentiles have neither Torah nor commandment, they are material without the form particular to humanity and are not called “human.” Moreover, in their being devoid of Torah they do not even exist, as it says, “All nations are as naught in His sight; He accounts them as less than nothing” (Isaiah 40:17). So also, the sages said, “the wicked while alive are called ‘dead’” (*Berakhot* 18b). Since the Torah is true life, in their being without it they are dead.

כי האמת הוא שהאומות ע"א כיון שאין להם אור תורה אינם נקראים אדם כמו שאמרו חז"ל על פסוק ואתן צאני צאן מרעייתי אדם אתם אתם קרויים אדם ואין אומות העולם ע"א קרויים אדם שהכוונה לומר שלהיות שיש צאן עומדת לטבח ויש צאן עומדת לגיזה וחלב וולדות לכן אמר אתנה צאני ולא צאן העומדת לטבח כי אם צאן מרעייתי כלו' פרנסתי שאינה עומדת לטביחה כי אם לפרנסה שבכיכול ישראל מפרנסין להקב"ה....

מי שבשם אדם יכונה צריך שיהיה לו זאת התורה שבעבורה נקרא האדם אדם וכיון שהאומות ע"א אין להם לא תורה ולא מצוה הם גולם בלי צורה המיוחדת לאדם ואינם נקראים אדם ולא זו לבד יקרה להם להיותם משוללים מהתורה אלא שאפילו מציאות אין להם כמו שנאמר כל הגוים כפאין נגדו מאפס ותהו נחשבו לו וכן אמרו ז"ל הרשעים בחייהם קרויים מתים שכיון שהתורה היא החיים האמתיים בהיותם זולתה הם מתים.



C. Treasure / Kingdom of Priests / Holy People: Connotations of Difference

11. Exodus 19:5-6 (God scripting Moses)

<p>⁵Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, ⁶but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the children of Israel.”</p>	<p>אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם וְאֶשָּׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֵא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי: וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ־לִי מַמְלַכַת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֱלֹהֵי הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תִּדְבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>
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12. Rashbam [Troyes (1085-1158)] on Exodus 19:5-6

<p>Indeed, all the earth is Mine—all the nations are mine, and I have chosen you exclusively. A kingdom of priests—princes, as in “David’s sons were priests” (2 Samuel 8:18).</p>	<p>כִּי לִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ - וְכָל הָעַמִּים שְׁלִי וְלֹא בַּחֲרָתִי כִּי אִם אֶתְכֶם לְבַדְכֶם: מַמְלַכַת כֹּהֲנִים - שְׂרִים כְּמוֹ וּבְנֵי דָוִד כֹּהֲנִים הָיוּ:</p>
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13. Ovadia Sforno [Italy (c. 1475-1550)] on Exodus 19:5-6 (exc.)

<p>You shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples - although the entire human race is more precious to me than the other lower beings, since God is manifest only in humankind. As the sages say, “Humanity is beloved for being created in the image [of God]” (<i>Avot</i> 3:14). Nevertheless, you will</p>	<p>וְהִיִּיתֶם לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים - אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁכָּל הַמִּין הָאָנוּשִׁי יָקָר אֲצֵלִי מִכָּל יֵתֵר הַנִּמְצָאִים הַשְּׁפֵלִים, כִּי הוּא לְבַדּוֹ הַמְכוּוֹן בָּהֶם, כְּאֹמֵר ז'ל חֲבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְצֶלֶם מִכָּל מְקוֹם אֵתֵם תְּהִיוּ לִי סֻגְלָה מִכָּלִם:</p>
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<p>be most treasured to me. You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests – In this respect you will be most treasured: you will be the kingdom of priests to bring about understanding, to teach the entire human race to call upon the name of God and to serve God in unity.</p>	<p>ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים. ובזה תהיו סגולה מכלם כי תהיו ממלכת כהנים להבין ולהורות לכל המין האנושי לקרוא כלם בשם ה', ולעבדו שכם אחד.</p>
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D. Alternatives?

14. Ayelet Naeh on “the Zoharic Model of Coexistence” (2020)⁶

The Zoharic model of integration directs us to take an interest in our adversaries, those people whose outlooks are different from ours, whom we might perceive as evil and as a threat to orderly existence as we see it. We must arrive at a deep understanding that our rivals also have a right to exist, needs of their own, and perspectives that for them are valid and true. This outlook is very different from a fantasy of coexistence built on similarity, in which we hope that the Other will accept our fundamental beliefs and we will therefore be able to live together in peace.

The Zohar’s model of coexistence is more demanding. Otherness is real, and coexistence is forged out of the understanding that integration is critical and essential. The hated object, the personal, social, or political Other, cannot be erased from the map or from our consciousness. We are tasked with recognizing its existence and with finding a way to live alongside it,

⁶ <https://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/publications-research/ajs-perspectives/the-hate-issue/on-integrating-the-hated-object-into-the-human-divine-totality-the-zoharic-model-of-coexistence>



weaving it into the great tapestry of divine, human, and psychological existence.

15. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, in *Judaism's Challenge: Election, Divine Love, and Human Enmity* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2020) pp. 45, 49

Kingdom of Priests provides an excellent prism for reflecting on Israel's particularity, especially in a contemporary context. It contains one of the fundamental tensions in understanding election—the tension between a status that is inherent unto itself and a mission that sees Israel's particularity as a function of its service to others. Kingdom of priests is not a hackneyed expression, such as “the chosen people,” “a treasured nation” (*am segula*) and other terms.... It can therefore serve as an invitation to think of Israel's election and status through its particular complexities ... Can we speak of a Kingdom of Priests, when large parts of the people do not follow the priestly vocation of dedication to God?

To reflect on what it means to be a Kingdom of Priests is an invitation to humility, given our failure, our inability to identify its meaning, or to apply it. As such, it is a wonderful antidote to other categories that could generate the contrary attitude. And it is this very humility that also makes this category a promising category for recovery of meaning and of attachment to a reality of being with God that can ultimately ascend to the greatest mystical heights, bringing blessing and understanding to Israel and the entire world.



16. Madeleine Albright, "Us vs. Them' Thinking Is Tearing America Apart," <https://time.com/5929843/madeleine-albright-us-vs-them-thinking/>, (on line Jan 15, 2021; published in *Time*, Feb 1 / Feb 8, 2021 [exc.]

At this moment of shock, sadness, and hope, it might be wise to reflect on the two most dangerous words in the human vocabulary: “us” and “them.” Last week, we received a dramatic reminder of this peril when our nation’s political divisions erupted into a spectacle of lawlessness on Capitol Hill.

The impulse to choose sides is inherent in our species. Psychologists point to our desire to be safe by joining groups with which we have an affinity, our fear of the unknown, and our vanity; we want to think of ourselves as better or smarter than the other. These traits are ingrained. For better or worse, we are clannish beings, and this has done much to shape our history....

In today’s not-so-United States, we must acknowledge that our divisions extend far beyond matters of political affiliation to include religion, race, gender, education, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and urban vs. rural. Confronted by this reality, many citizens are tempted either to retreat more deeply into their respective group identities or to insist piously that such categories are irrelevant and should not matter. Neither approach works. Exacerbating our differences is one road to disaster; denying them is another. Instead of fantasizing about a harmony that is out of reach, we should focus on ensuring that our inevitable disagreements lead whenever possible to constructive outcomes.

