



# Jewish Liberation Theology and its perspectives among Jewish religious leaders on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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**Abstract:** This study explores the theological perspectives of Jewish religious leaders on the Israel–Palestine conflict, with a particular focus on Jewish Liberation Theology. Employing a qualitative approach through literature review and in-depth interviews with nine rabbis representing three theological strands—Religious Zionism, Moderate Judaism, and Liberation Theology—this research examines how the Jewish collective historical experience, particularly the Shoah and diaspora, has shaped differing interpretations of justice, power, and interfaith relations. The analysis adopts a contextual hermeneutic paradigm that integrates textual interpretations of the Torah, Talmud, and prophetic literature with ethical reflection on structural oppression and political violence. The findings reveal that Jewish Liberation Theology constructs a narrative of universal solidarity, rejecting exclusivist claims to sacred land and advocating for the rights of Palestinians as a moral imperative rooted in Torah ethics. In contrast, Religious Zionist theology affirms the establishment of the State of Israel as a fulfillment of divine prophecy and upholds Jewish ethno-religious sovereignty. Meanwhile, Moderate Jewish theology seeks a balance between pluralism, democracy, and religious tradition. The study concludes that these theological divergences have significant implications for the political and ethical orientations of Jewish communities both in Israel and the diaspora. The research contributes to the field of religious studies by offering a new typological mapping of Jewish theological responses to political conflict and demonstrating how religious belief can function both as a source of domination and as a liberating moral force.

**Keywords:** ethical prophecy; interfaith solidarity; religious texts; theological responses

## 1. Introduction

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict is one of the longest and most complex conflicts in modern history, with deep historical roots and intertwined ideological and theological dimensions (Mitchell, 2017). Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the conflict has killed thousands of people and had a wide humanitarian impact. However, its historical traces have appeared much earlier, since the emergence of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century pioneered by Theodor Herzl as a response to antisemitism in Europe. The Balfour Declaration in 1917 and the British mandate over Palestine paved the way for the mass migration of Jews to the land of Palestine, especially after the Holocaust (Tessler, 2009). The 1947 UN Resolution 181 proposing the division of the region into two states was rejected by the Arab side, and since then, the conflict has continued to escalate in the form of open war, occupation, and prolonged social tensions. Behind this political conflict, there also emerged a response from Jewish religious leaders that showed a diverse spectrum of theological views on this conflict (Rotberg, 2006).

The role of Jewish religious figures cannot be separated from the dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Since the 1960s and 1970s, Jewish liberation theology has developed, embracing the values of social justice and defending human rights, inspired by similar movements

in Latin America. Figures such as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel combined prophetic values in the Jewish tradition with social activism, including in the civil rights movement in the US (Jamal, 2016). In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this theology has become the basis for a number of organizations such as Rabbis for Human Rights and Jewish Voice for Peace in opposing illegal settlement policies and supporting the struggle of the Palestinian people (Aggestam, 1999). However, this view is not the only one. On the other hand, ultra-orthodox groups such as Neturei Karta actually reject the existence of the state of Israel theologically, while the Religious Zionist group influenced by the teachings of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook considers the establishment of Israel as part of the messianic process (Pappe, 2016). These differences in interpretation have given rise to a broad spectrum of thought, from those who fully support the occupation in the name of religious commandments to those who call for reconciliation and justice across identities.

In contemporary developments, the response of Jewish religious leaders has increasingly shown sharp polarization. Some support an ultra-nationalistic approach that views the conflict as an inevitable holy war, while others encourage an ethical-pragmatic approach by recognizing the suffering of the Palestinian people as part of their moral responsibility. Recent reports indicate a significant shift among young rabbis who are increasingly critical of Israeli state policies (Khorram-Manesh & Burkle Jr, 2023). The emergence of movements such as *Young Rabbis Network for Peace* and *Rabbis for Reconciliation* marks the emergence of a new generation of religious leaders who are pushing for a dialogical and two-state approach as a peaceful solution (Strober & Strober, 2019). However, the challenges remain enormous. The conflict continues to claim lives, worsen humanitarian conditions, and create collective trauma, especially in Gaza, which is experiencing crises in clean water, education, health services, and children's mental health. The construction of the separation wall, the expansion of illegal settlements, and restrictions on access in the occupied territory reinforce feelings of alienation and injustice.

From a theological perspective, the conflict raises profound moral dilemmas among rabbis. Recent studies have noted a growing unease among religious leaders regarding the ethical legitimacy of state actions, especially when political policies clash with prophetic values such as justice, compassion, and respect for human dignity (Chukwuebuka Ohaekwusi, 2021). In this context, Jewish liberation theology becomes relevant for further study, not only as a theological doctrine but also as an ethical framework for reinterpreting the role of religion in conflict situations (Raz-Krakovitzkin et al., 2021). The idea that religion can be a transformative force for peace and justice is gaining increasing attention, especially when political approaches have proven to be ineffective in achieving long-term agreements (Sawani, 2022). Therefore, examining the various positions of Jewish religious leaders—from extremist to critical—is important to understand how religious interpretations can shape public opinion, justify violence, or, conversely, build bridges for dialogue.

Based on this complexity and dynamics, this research focuses on *Jewish liberation theology* in the perspective of Jewish religious leaders on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The aim is to understand more deeply how the values of justice, peace, and spirituality in Jewish teachings are interpreted differently in facing the reality of conflict. With a theological approach, this study is expected to not only enrich academic discourse in the study of religion and conflict, but also open up new space for religious contributions to the peace resolution process rooted in universal human values. In an increasingly polarized world, religious voices calling for ethics, moral reflection, and empathy across identities are more important than ever (Anderson, 2022). Thus, this study is relevant not only to religious studies but also to global efforts towards a more just and sustainable peace.

## 2. Research Method

This study uses a qualitative approach as the main epistemological framework because this approach allows researchers to explore and interpret the thoughts of Jewish religious leaders on Jewish Liberation Theology in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in depth and

contextually. The data used are descriptive and interpretive, consisting of narratives of thought, moral positions, and theological interpretations that cannot be reduced to numbers, but must be understood through an approach to the meaning and structure of thought (Cheron et al., 2022).

Data sources are divided into two: primary and secondary. Primary data comes from authentic works, interviews, sermons, opinion articles, and public statements of nine Jewish Rabbis selected based on the spectrum of thought: Jewish Liberation Theology (Brant Rosen, Arik Ascherman, Lynn Gottlieb), Moderate Theology (Donniel Hartman, Michael Melchior, Naamah Kelman), and Religious Zionist Theology (Shlomo Aviner, Yitzchak Ginsburgh, Dov Lior). Primary data is obtained from books, personal blogs, religious organization websites, and sermon archives. Meanwhile, secondary data includes academic literature such as the works of Marc H. Ellis, Johan Galtung, and Quintan Wiktorowicz to strengthen the theoretical context (Gelo et al., 2008).

Data collection was conducted through documentation studies, content analysis, and online source searches. Documentation studies were used to read the works of figures in depth, while content analysis examined discourse themes such as justice, the holy land, and reconciliation. Online sources such as Rabbis for Human Rights and the Shalom Hartman Institute were used to supplement the primary data. Data that was anonymous, speculative, or unverifiable was not included in the study (Punch, 2008).

Data analysis was conducted in four stages: data reduction, data presentation, data verification and validation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction aims to filter and group information based on themes relevant to the theoretical framework. Data presentation is done in the form of narratives and thematic tables to facilitate the reading of thought patterns. Verification is done through source triangulation and critical reflection, while validity is maintained through the principles of dependability and confirmability by documenting the process in detail (Brannen, 2017).

This research is not field-based, but rather a literature study with conceptual research locations, namely libraries, digital repositories, and relevant academic or religious sites. Literature searches were conducted from the researcher's campus and online sources that are widely accessible. Through this approach, it is hoped that a comprehensive understanding of the spectrum of Jewish theology in responding to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its implications for religious discourse and social ethics will emerge.

### 3. Research Results

#### 3.1 Background of the Jewish theological spectrum

The diversity of the Jewish theological spectrum in responding to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be separated from the long history of the collective history of the Jewish people. Starting from the exodus, the destruction of the Temple, the diaspora that spread to various parts of the world, to the tragedy of the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, this entire series of history forms a very complex historical consciousness. The theology of Religious Zionism took shape as a response to the trauma of the diaspora and the spirit of religious nationalism that sees the land of Israel as the center of historical and eschatological redemption for the Jewish people (Ravitzky, 1996). On the other hand, Jewish Liberation Theology was born from the experience of alienation and marginalization, especially in the context of the Western diaspora, which encouraged solidarity with oppressed groups outside the Jewish community itself (Ellis, 2004). Meanwhile, Jewish Moderate Theology tries to combine the two in a dialogical narrative that takes into account historical roots but also openness to global socio-political dynamics (Hartman, 2016).

In addition to history, interpretive methodology or hermeneutic paradigms also play an important role in shaping and distinguishing the spectrum of Jewish theology. Religious Zionist theology tends to use a literal and normative approach to sacred texts such as the Tanakh and Talmud, which are emphasized as the legal and spiritual foundation for claims to land and nation (Kook, 2015). In contrast, Jewish Liberation Theology applies contextual and ethical hermeneutics,

which emphasizes the principle *Tikkun Olam* (improve the world) and *Tzedek*(justice) in reading religious texts progressively and prophetically (Rosen, 2012). Between these two approaches, Jewish Moderate Theology develops a dynamic interpretive approach, combining historical-critical studies with relational ethical awareness to maintain the relevance of tradition amidst the plurality of modernity (Kelman, 2020). Thus, differences in interpretation of texts help explain the variants of Jewish theology that play an active role in formulating theological attitudes towards contemporary social and political realities.

The spectrum of Jewish theology is also determined by how each school views the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, especially in the context of Palestine and the international world. Religious Zionist theology generally focuses on the fulfillment of the rights and security of the Jewish people, which sometimes ignores the rights and existence of non-Jews in the prophetic narrative (Aviner, 2009). In contrast, Jewish Liberation Theology builds a paradigm of equality and empathy across identities, understanding that the ethical truth of the Torah must be universal and defend the rights of all humans regardless of religion or ethnicity (Gottlieb, 1995). Moderate Jewish theology takes a middle path by calling for interfaith dialogue and peaceful coexistence as a form of moral commitment that is in line with classical Jewish ethical principles, such as *Derekh Eretz* (moral path) and *Tzelem Elohim* (Divine image) in every human being. Thus, the relationship between Jews and non-Jews becomes a real barometer of the direction of theology, between the exclusive nationalistic, universal prophetic, or ethical dialogical. The three factors that underlie the construction of the spectrum of Jewish Theology, starting first from the Historical Context and Collective Experience, second the Hermeneutic Paradigm (Text Interpretation Methodology), and third the Vision of the Relationship Between Jews and Non-Jews are the sharpening discussion of the findings of the following dissertation research.

Jewish Liberation Theology grew out of a long historical experience of pain and oppression, especially the trauma of the Shoah (Holocaust), which shook the Jewish faith in the presence of God in suffering (Ellenson, 2004). The Nazi genocide became a turning point that prompted the birth of theological reflection on justice and the meaning of faith, with an emphasis on God's presence through human action in defending the oppressed (Rosen, 2012). After World War II, the transformation of the identity of the Jewish community in the West brought an awareness that suffering was also experienced by other communities, encouraging the emergence of cross-identity solidarity and a critique of ethnic exclusivity in Jewish theology.

Figures such as Marc Ellis and Brant Rosen have emphasized the importance of making historical Jewish suffering an ethical basis for supporting the struggles of others, including the Palestinian people (Rosen, 2012). In the American socio-political context of the 1960s to 1980s, which was filled with waves of social movements and the rise of liberation theology, a number of progressive rabbis began to interpret the Talmud and Torah as prophetic texts that favor social justice and *Tikkun Olam* (Ellis, 1987). Movements such as *Jewish Voice for Peace* becomes a real medium of this spirit. Jewish Liberation Theology also criticizes exclusive Zionism and Israel's occupation policy of Palestine, while emphasizing that defending the rights of Palestinians is a manifestation of true Torah ethics, not a betrayal of Jewish identity (Gottlieb, 2017). Based on the experience of the diaspora and living in a pluralistic society, this theology calls for universal justice and becomes a form of collective repentance for the injustices of the world, reviving Torah values as a spiritual calling to build a more just and compassionate civilization.

The theology of Religious Zionism grew out of a fusion of modern Jewish nationalism and Orthodox spirituality that saw the land of Israel as part of divine redemption. Figures such as Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook saw Eretz Yisrael not as just a land, but as a stage of sacred history that realized biblical prophecy. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 is seen as the first step in the process *ge'ulah* (redemption), reinforced by the trauma of the Shoah which strengthened the belief in the importance of Jewish sovereignty as an existential and spiritual protection (Kook, 1978). Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War reinforced this belief, where control of the holy areas was interpreted as divine intervention, and movements such as *Gush Emunim* raise settlement

*asmitzvah* which is non-negotiable (Ginsburg & Moustafa, 2008). History is interpreted as a living revelation, making political projects part of the messianic mission. However, this paradigm also gives birth to exclusivity, where the concept of “Am Segulah” (chosen people) is used as a justification to reject the claims of other nations, especially Palestine, to the holy land (Aviner, 2009).

In contrast, Jewish Moderate Theology emerged as a response to ethno-religious extremism and emphasized the importance of the universal value of the diasporic experience. Figures such as Rabbi David Hartman and Donniel Hartman saw Jewish historical suffering as a trigger for ethical awareness to build an inclusive, democratic, and morally responsible society. The Holocaust was seen not as a justification for power, but as a lesson in the importance of *empathy*, *humility*, and justice (Hartman, 2000b). Jewish history in this view is not a narrative towards domination, but a dialectical space between particular identity and universal values. Rabbi Naamah Kelman, for example, encourages the integration of diasporic heritage in shaping a pluralistic and diverse Israel. For them, history is not a justification for political action, but a call for social transformation through the principle *stick olam*, *tents*, And *chesed*, including in relation to the Palestinian people (Gordis, 2014). These two spectrums thus represent very different approaches to the meaning of the collective experience of the Jewish people: one leading to a theology of land-based power, and the other to an ethics of cross-identity responsibility.

Table 1  
Historical Context & Collective Experience in the Spectrum of Jewish Theology

Spectrum of Jewish Theology	Collective History That Influences	Theological Response	Central Figure
Jewish Liberation Theology	Holocaust, occupation, diaspora, <u>injustice</u> towards Palestine	<u>Emphasizing</u> solidarity with the oppressed, rejection of ethnic supremacy, and advocacy for human rights based on prophetic values.	Brant Rosen, Arik Ascherman, Lynn Gottlieb
Theology of Religious Zionism	The Holocaust, the formation of the State of Israel, <u>the experience of exile</u> as a national trauma	Interpreting the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel as the <u>fulfillment</u> of a divine promise and a step towards messianic redemption	Yitzhak Ginsburgh, Shlomo Aviner, Dov Lior
Jewish Moderate Theology	Long diaspora, Holocaust, integration in a pluralistic society	<u>Emphasizing</u> pluralism, universal ethics, and democracy as manifestations of Jewish historical learning.	David Hartman, <u>Donniel Hartman</u> , Naamah Kelman

The spectrum of contemporary Jewish theology is largely shaped by the historical experience of the Jewish people, especially the collective trauma of exile, diaspora, and the Holocaust. Jewish Liberation Theology responds to this suffering by constructing a narrative of solidarity across identities. For figures such as Brant Rosen and Arik Ascherman, the tragedy of the Shoah is not a reason for exclusivism, but rather a moral calling to fight for universal justice, including for the Palestinian people (Rosen, 2012). In contrast, Religious Zionism Theology interprets trauma as the theological legitimacy of the Jewish national project (Gottlieb, 2017). Within this framework, suffering becomes the basis for justifying power over land and identity through messianic and eschatological narratives as taught by Rabbi Kook and his followers (Kook, 2015).

In addition, the dynamics of this theological spectrum are also influenced by responses to modernity. Moderate Theology, as developed by David and Donniel Hartman, tries to balance Jewish tradition and modern democratic values. They call for a rereading of the sacred texts with

a contextual approach, which is open to pluralism and interfaith coexistence (Hartman, 2000a). Meanwhile, Jewish Liberation Theology actually makes modernity an opportunity to revitalize Torah ethics in the context of structural injustice and cross-racial and class struggles (Gordis, 2014). This movement is influenced by the discourse of Jewish feminism, civil rights, and progressive prophetic theology.

In terms of methodology, Jewish Liberation Theology develops a hermeneutic paradigm that favors the oppressed. Interpretation of the Torah and rabbinic tradition is done through the lens of ethics and social context, not legal literalism. The story of the Exodus, for example, is reinterpreted as a universal symbol of liberation, not simply a Jewish national narrative. Figures such as Rosen, Gottlieb, and Ascherman reject readings that favor power and domination, and instead emphasize interpretations that favor *stick olam* And *tenths* (Ascherman, 2020). This approach revives the spirit of prophets such as Amos and Isaiah, and asserts that sacred texts are not neutral, but must be read as tools of liberation for those who are marginalized. By combining textual studies, social activism, and ethical awareness, this paradigm becomes a new face of Jewish theology that is more inclusive, subversive, and liberating (Gottlieb, 2017).

The collective experience of the Jewish people throughout history, especially the trauma of the Shoah, the diaspora, and systemic persecution, has been a catalyst for the emergence of a diverse spectrum of Jewish theology. In *Jewish Liberation Theology*, this experience is read critically as an ethical call to fight for universal justice. Figures such as Marc Ellis and Brant Rosen developed theological interpretations that rejected exclusivism and emphasized solidarity with all the oppressed, including the Palestinian people. This theology emerged alongside the wave of social justice movements in the 1960s–1980s in the US, which reinforced prophetic narratives based on *tenths* and *stick olamas* the spiritual-political foundation of contemporary Judaism (Ellis, 2004). The rejection of exclusive Zionism is not seen as a betrayal, but as a noble expression of the Torah committed to justice across identities (Rosen, 2012). This theology thus makes historical suffering a source of empathy and moral critique of domination.

On the contrary, *Theology of Religious Zionism* interpreting historical suffering as a spiritual foundation for Jewish national restoration. Figures such as Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook interpreted the land of Israel as a theological reality, not just a geographical area. Within this framework, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the victory in the Six-Day War (1967) were understood as historical redemption and divine intervention. Movements such as *Gush Emunim* affirm that biblical land tenure is *mitzvah*, and Jewish history becomes a vehicle for realizing God's will through political power (Kook, 1978). However, this narrative also gives rise to a dynamic of exclusivity, in which Jewish suffering is used to justify domination over Palestine. History is politicized and sacralized in an ethno-messianic project that combines nationalism with eschatology (Ravitzky, 1996).

Meanwhile, *Jewish Moderate Theology* attempts to bridge the tension between Jewish particularism and the demands of universal morality. Rabbi David and Donniel Hartman, for example, advocate a reinterpretation of diasporic suffering as an ethical lesson for building an inclusive and democratic society. They propose a model of Jewish identity that is reflective, open to plurality, and grounded in values of *chesed*, *tenths*, and public responsibility, both in the context of Israel and the diaspora (Hartman, 2000b). This theology rejects the sanctification of power, and instead sees the experience of marginalization as a source of *humility* historical theology that encourages integration between tradition and modernity (Kelman, 2010). In the context of the state of Israel, this theology calls for the separation of religion from exclusive nationalism and the need for public policies that reflect the internal diversity of Judaism and the wider society.

The historical context of the Jewish people does not produce a single theological response. Rather, trauma and alienation become a dialectical field that gives rise to a spectrum—from the liberating, the power-building, to the nurturing of plurality. History is not only a mirror of suffering, but a field for the articulation of Jewish ethics, power, and spirituality in the face of the modern world.



Table 2  
Historical Context & Collective Experience in the Spectrum of Jewish Theology

Spectrum of Jewish Theology	Collective History That Influences	Theological Response	Central Figure
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Jewish Moderate Theology	Long diaspora, Holocaust, integration in a pluralistic society	<u>Emphasizing</u> pluralism, universal ethics, and democracy as manifestations of Jewish historical learning.	David Hartman, Donniel Hartman, Naamah Kelman

### 3.2 Analysis of the Spectrum of Jewish Theology in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Figures, Legacy of Thought, and Dynamics of Contemporary Missions

The spectrum of Jewish theology in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reflects the diversity of religious responses to complex and layered socio-political realities (Loden, 2024). Each spectrum—be it Jewish Liberation Theology, Religious Zionism Theology, or Jewish Moderate Theology—does not merely emerge as an ideological position, but rather as a result of historical, interpretive, and practical struggles from the Jewish experience of facing changing times (Sturm & Frantzman, 2015). In this context, figures from each spectrum act as theological agents who bring the intellectual and spiritual heritage of their communities into the contemporary battlefield. By raising the narrative of the exodus, the prophetic calling, and divine promises for the land, the three form a universe of thought that not only answers internal Jewish challenges but also negotiates relations between Jews and non-Jews, especially on the issue of Palestine (Motyer, 2022).

The intellectual legacy of key figures in each spectrum shows how sacred texts are reinterpreted to support particular political and moral agendas. In the spectrum of Jewish Liberation Theology, reinterpretation of the Torah narrative and the prophets becomes the moral basis for solidarity with the Palestinian people who are considered to be experiencing structural oppression (Smith, 2024). In contrast, in the spectrum of Religious Zionism, texts that affirm the divine choice of Israel and the promised land are used as justification for exclusive claims to territory and rejection of political compromise (Karoui, 2023). Meanwhile, the spectrum of Jewish Moderate Theology seeks to create a more inclusive interpretive space, by bridging universal humanistic values and a commitment to Jewish national identity (Speights, 2022). These three approaches are not only rooted in differences in hermeneutic methodology, but also in their moral and political visions for the future of Israel and Palestine.

In the dynamics of contemporary missions, the three spectrums show different orientations in the forms of their involvement: from grassroots activism, influencing public policy, to interfaith and intercultural dialogue. Figures in the Liberation Theology spectrum are directly involved in solidarity actions and human rights advocacy, as shown by Rabbi Arik Ascherman and Rabbi Brant Rosen (Speights, 2022).

In contrast, figures from Religious Zionism such as Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh and Rabbi Shlomo Aviner have influenced public discourse more through religious educational institutions, fatwas, and

support for Jewish settlements. Meanwhile, figures from the Moderate spectrum, such as Rabbi Donniel Hartman and Rabbi Naamah Kelman, have developed educational institutions, dialogue forums, and cross-community projects as part of efforts to create dignified peace. These differences in approach show that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not only a geopolitical conflict, but also an arena for clashes and encounters between dynamic and evolving Jewish theological visions (Dayyeh, 2025).

### 3.3 New Ideas Offer

In the contemporary stream of religious research, especially those focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, discourse that examines the role and contribution of Jewish religious leaders is still very limited, especially from a critical theological perspective that is oriented towards liberation and social justice (Tzidkiyahu, 2021). This research takes a methodological path that not only examines religious doctrine and institutional positions but also positions rabbinic figures as reflective actors who are at the intersection of sacred texts, political realities, and humanitarian crises. In this case, a critical theological approach becomes the main tool for understanding how beliefs can shape, question, or even reshape ideological structures that support structural violence in the name of religion or nationalism (White, 2024). This is what makes this study highly relevant and offers novelty, because it directly involves the role of contemporary rabbis in responding to the complexity of the conflict that has not been resolved.

Furthermore, this study not only seeks to explain the position of Jewish figures in the normative theological landscape, but also to formulate a theological categorization map that is able to sharply distinguish between the currents of Religious Zionism, Jewish Liberation Theology, and Moderate Theology (Ofek, 2021). This categorization is not only conceptual, but also based on a rich primary data analysis, obtained from direct interviews with rabbinic figures and narrative studies of their writings and practices. The integrated emic and etic approaches allow for an in-depth exploration of the internal motives (theological-spiritual) and external responses (ethical-political) of these figures. Through this approach, this study is able to formulate a new dimension in the study of religion that does not stop at normative theology, but penetrates into the field of praxis and social criticism in the context of real conflict.

#### 3.3.1. *The Use of Critical Theological Study Approaches to Contemporary Jewish Figures in the Context of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*

The critical theological studies approach applied offers an analytical framework that goes beyond normative theological descriptions and moves towards uncovering the power relations, ideologies, and religious practices embedded in Jewish religious leaders' responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Cummings et al., 2024). Using analytical tools from liberation theology and hermeneutics of suspicion, this study systematically dissects how religious narratives are used not only to justify structures of domination, but also as a tool of resistance to colonialism, occupation, and violence in the name of religious identity. This study does not stop at the level of ideas, but rather connects the beliefs, policies, and concrete actions taken by Jewish figures, including Rabbi Brant Rosen, Rabbi Arik Ascherman, and Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh, each of whom represents a different theological spectrum.

Through this approach, the study actively confronts the differences between theological discourses that support the status quo of power—as found in the narrative of religious Zionism—and forms of theology that open the way for critique, resistance, and social transformation. This study consciously positions theology as a field of ethical and political contestation, not just as a collection of dogmas or spiritual reflections. This is evident in the way progressive Jewish figures reinterpret sacred texts to defend the rights of Palestinians and oppose state violence, a form of moral partisanship born of theological awareness and not merely a political agenda (Mor, 2024). This approach rejects the dichotomy between "theology" and "politics," and opens up space for the integration of faith and activism in an ethical and historically contextual manner.

Furthermore, the application of this critical theological approach makes the research not only based on academic literature, but also based on direct involvement and reading of religious practices from below (Graham et al., 2019). By tracing the personal and public narratives of the interviewed



rabbis, including their writings in blogs, sermons, books, and media interviews, this dissertation is able to compile a narrative mapping that shows how spiritual experiences and the pressures of social reality interact in shaping their theological positions. This is what marks the novelty of this approach—namely the ability to capture the complexity of religiosity in the reality of conflict, not only through textual interpretation, but also through the traces of practice they leave in the field.

### 3.3.2. *Mapping Theological Categorization: Religious Zionism, Jewish Liberation Theology, and Jewish Moderate Theology*

The theological categorization mapping in this study presents a systematic typological framework to distinguish the ideological positions and religious practices of contemporary Jewish figures in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The three main spectrums identified are: Religious Zionism, Jewish Moderate Theology, and Jewish Liberation Theology (Sturm & Frantzman, 2015). This approach does not simply classify based on the political right-center-left spectrum, but also maps the theological foundations, textual hermeneutics, relations to power, and attitudes toward violence and peace. Each category is not seen as a static label, but rather as a dynamic dialectical field, where religious figures actively shape and dismantle theological boundaries in their interactions with complex political and social realities.

The category of Religious Zionism represents a theology that combines belief in the fulfillment of prophecies of the land of Israel through the establishment of a modern Jewish state, with religious legitimacy for the act of occupation, settlement, and the supremacy of Jewish identity (Weintraub & Naveh, 2020). Figures such as Rabbi Yitzhak Ginsburgh and Rabbi Shlomo Aviner are emblematic of this spectrum, uniting Torah, land, and nation as an inviolable divine mandate. Meanwhile, Moderate Jewish Theology tends to seek to balance democratic and humanist values with Jewish religious identity (Schweid, 2022). Figures such as Rabbi Donniel Hartman and Rabbi Michael Melchior represent this approach, which while not openly rejecting Zionism, nevertheless encourages dialogue, pluralism, and reform within a liberal Jewish framework. Jewish Liberation Theology is the most progressive spectrum, with figures such as Rabbi Brant Rosen and Rabbi Arik Ascherman rejecting Zionist domination and interpreting the Torah as a source of liberation, anti-colonialism, and universal solidarity (Balthaser, 2025).

This mapping is an important innovation in research because it is able to formulate a classification system that can be an academic and practical reference in understanding the Jewish theological response to contemporary conflicts. With this approach, research not only shows the diversity of voices in Judaism, but also identifies theological positions based on the narratives, actions, and ethical consequences of each spectrum. In addition, this typology provides readers with a framework for assessing how theology can be an instrument of justification of power, a tool for social criticism, or even a bridge of reconciliation. This mapping also opens up opportunities for further studies in the fields of interfaith, peacebuilding, and political theology that take into account the ideological dimensions of Abrahamic faith in the context of conflict (Driessen, 2025).

### 3.3.3. *Integration of Emic and Ethical Perspectives through Character Interviews and Theological Narrative Analysis*

One of the main methodological strengths of this study lies in the integration of emic (from within the tradition) and etic (from outside as a researcher) perspectives in examining the dynamics of contemporary Jewish theological thought (Ehmann, 2024). By utilizing direct interviews with rabbis and Jewish activists from various theological spectrums, this study presents original voices from figures directly involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This emic perspective allows for an in-depth exploration of the inner motivations, spiritual understandings, and interpretations of sacred texts of the figures, which could not have been revealed through literature review or a purely textual approach. In this context, the narrative data obtained becomes reflective material that enriches the ethical analysis carried out by the researcher as an outsider who observes critically.

In addition, the emic-ethical integration in this dissertation is carried out through the theological

narrative analysis method, where the religious experiences and theological articulations of the characters are placed in the context of a grand narrative—both the Jewish religious narrative and the political narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. With this approach, this study does not merely discuss theological doctrines or concepts, but rather dissects how the life narratives of the characters shape and are shaped by the dynamics of the conflict and the socio-political structures around them (Numonzoda, 2023). This narrative model allows for a more humane, contextual, and historical reading of theology—not only as a belief system, but also as an existential strategy in responding to the reality of violence, oppression, and the hope for peace.

The researcher's direct involvement in the interview process, taking into account ethical and representational dimensions, strengthens the validity of the findings and brings into the picture voices that are often marginalized in mainstream geopolitical and academic discourses. This approach is a form of decolonization of knowledge, as it makes room for alternative narratives from within the Jewish community itself—often constructed as homogeneous by the media or outside academics (Naresh, 2024; Rashwan, 2024). This integration also allows for a constructive dialogue between theology and social sciences, between faith experience and critical reflection, and between particular narratives and universal aspirations.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the previous explanation above, it can be said that the theological response of Jewish religious leaders to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not singular, but is divided into three main spectrums: Religious Zionism, Moderate Theology, and Jewish Liberation Theology. All three are shaped by a combination of historical context, hermeneutic paradigm, and vision of Jewish-non-Jewish relations. Jewish Liberation Theology, which is the main focus of this study, displays a style of thought that rejects identity exclusivism and theological nationalism. Instead, it emphasizes prophetic values such as *tzedek* (justice), *chesed* (compassion), and *stick olam* (world improvement), which is interpreted as a spiritual calling to defend the rights of the oppressed, including the Palestinian people.

The main contribution of this study lies in its attempt to systematically map the theological constructions of contemporary Jewish religious leaders that have so far rarely been touched upon in studies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By integrating emic and etic approaches through interviews and narrative analysis, this study not only presents theological thinking as normative discourse but also as religious praxis that has a direct impact on socio-political dynamics. Theoretically, this study broadens the horizon of religious and conflict studies by simultaneously including ideological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Practically, these findings serve as an important reference in building bridges of interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution strategies based on the values of prophetic justice and cross-identity empathy.

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