



Religious Studies Department

A Level

OCR

Developments in Jewish Thought

Year 13

Post Holocaust theology

6. Challenges

Challenges facing religious thought from areas such as science, secularisation, migration and multi-cultural societies and changing gender roles

Topic	Content	Key Knowledge
Post- Holocaust theology	- the responses of theologians and thinkers to the Holocaust, including: - the Refutation or 'Death' of G-d (Richard Rubenstein) - the 614th Commandment (Emile Fackenheim) - Churban (Ignaz Maybaum) - Hidden G-d (<i>Hester Panim</i>) (Eliezer Berkovitz)	- G-d and the death camps - doubt of G-d - G-d as the Ultimate Nothing/Nothingness and G-d - religious duty - Jews forbidden to hand Hitler a posthumous victory - role of Hitler - Holocaust and Sacrifice - G-d's providential plan - remnant - free will - Hidden G-d (<i>Hester Panim</i>) - Holocaust as a human and historical event 'Job' and the modern Jew
	Learners should have the opportunity to discuss issues related to challenge that the Holocaust has posed to Judaism, including: - a comparison of the ways in which the listed scholars addressed the issues raised by the Holocaust - the challenges posed by the Holocaust for the traditional view of the G-d of classical theism - the philosophical and ethical consequences of the Holocaust for understanding the role of G-d and man in the world - the physical consequences on world Jewry of the Holocaust and the increase of anti-Semitism post-Holocaust - Orthodox and Progressive responses to the Holocaust	
	Contextual references <i>For reference, the ideas of Rubenstein, Fackenheim, MAYbaum and Berkovitz listed above can be found in:</i> - Rubenstein, R. <i>After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism</i> - Fackenheim, E. <i>The Jewish return into history</i> - Maybaum, I. <i>The Face of God after Auschwitz</i> - Berkovitz, E. <i>Faith after the Holocaust</i>	

Curriculum Planner

Topic	Content Point	Approx. Hours of teaching	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Suggested resources, scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority
			Adler's Lovers Covenant or Brit Ahuvim. • rethinking marriage as partnership • dissolving the Brit Ahuvim • the Get and Adler's response to the Get • the reconstruction and reconfiguration of the marriage tradition. Orthodox and Progressive responses to 'rethinking' women in marriage • Orthodox responses to Adler's thinking • Progressive responses to Adler's thinking • how Adler's approach may echo some secular approaches to relationships, and how Orthodox and Progressive Judaism may respond to this.	
6. Challenges Post-Holocaust Theology	Introduction to Post-Holocaust Theology		The origins and scale of the twentieth-century Holocaust (areas to be covered briefly as background only) • 'Shoah' • pre-war Jewish Life • 1933 and Rise of Hitler • Nuremberg Laws • ghettos • deportations • concentration and death camps • genocide of Judaism • post-war Judaism. Post-Holocaust Theology • rise of Post-Holocaust Theology in Judaism and in other religions • introduction to the key figures to be studied.	www.het.org.uk www.hmd.org.uk www.Holocausteducation.org.uk Cohn-Sherbok, D. (2003), <i>Judaism. History, Belief and Practice</i>, Routledge, Chapters 46, 49-50. Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i>, Gracewing; Cromwell Press, Chapter 1. Hoffman, C.M. (2010), <i>Teach Yourself: Judaism</i>, Hodder Education, Chapter 16 Trepp, L., (2000) <i>Judaism. Development and Life 4th Edition</i>, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Chapter 9

Curriculum Planner

Topic	Content Point	Approx. Hours of teaching	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Suggested resources, scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority
	The Refutation or 'Death' of G-d (Richard Rubenstein)	1.5	Richard Rubenstein • brief overview of contextual and academic background from which Rubenstein emerged • Rubenstein and the Holocaust. If appropriate and suitable, reading of a selection of primary source material by Rubenstein e.g. • Rubenstein, R. <i>After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism</i>. Explanatory reading: • Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i> (Gracewing; Cromwell Press), chapter 7. Key concepts in Rubenstein's thinking: • G-d and the death camps • doubt of G-d • G-d as the Ultimate Nothing/Nothingness and G-d • human evil.	Rubenstein, R. <i>After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism</i> Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i>, Gracewing; Cromwell Press, Chapter 7
	The 614th Commandment (Emile Fackenheim)	1.5	Emile Fackenheim • brief overview of contextual and academic background from which Fackenheim emerged • Fackenheim and the Holocaust. If appropriate and suitable, reading of a selection of primary source material by Fackenheim e.g. • Fackenheim, E., <i>The Jewish return into history</i>. Explanatory reading: • Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i> (Gracewing; Cromwell Press), chapter 4. Key concepts in Fackenheim's thinking: • religious duty • Jews forbidden to hand Hitler a posthumous victory • commanding voice of Auschwitz • mending the world.	Fackenheim, E. <i>The Jewish return into history</i>

Topic	Content Point	Approx. Hours of teaching	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Suggested resources, scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority
	Churban (Ignaz Maybaum)	1.5	Ignaz Maybaum • brief overview of contextual and academic background from which Maybaum emerged • Maybaum and the Holocaust. If appropriate and suitable, reading of a selection of primary source material by Maybaum e.g. • Maybaum, I. <i>The Face of God after Auschwitz</i>. Explanatory reading: • Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i> (Gracewing; Cromwell Press), chapter 3. Key concepts in Maybaum's thinking: • role of Hitler • Holocaust and sacrifice • G-d's providential plan • remnant • Holocaust as Churban.	Maybaum, I. <i>The Face of God after Auschwitz</i> Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i>, Gracewing; Cromwell Press, Chapter 3
	Hidden G-d (Hester Panim) (Eliezer Berkovitz)	1.5	Eliezer Berkovitz • brief overview of contextual and academic background from which Berkovitz emerged • Berkovitz and the Holocaust. If appropriate and suitable, reading of a selection of primary source material by Berkovitz e.g. • Berkovitz, E. <i>Faith after the Holocaust</i>. Explanatory reading: • Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i> (Gracewing; Cromwell Press), chapter 5. Key concepts in Berkovitz's thinking: • free will • hidden G-d (Hester Panim) • Holocaust as a human and historical event • 'Job' and the modern Jew.	Berkovitz, E. <i>Faith after the Holocaust</i> Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i>, Gracewing; Cromwell Press, Chapter 5

Curriculum Planner

Topic	Content Point	Approx. Hours of teaching	Suggested Teaching and Learning	Suggested resources, scholarly views, academic approaches and sources of wisdom and authority
	Topic Evaluation	2	Comparison of the ways in which the listed scholars addressed the issues raised by the Holocaust • understanding of G-d • understanding of man. The challenges posed by the Holocaust for the traditional view of the G-d of classical theism • G-d as omnipotent and omniscient • G-d as omnibenevolent • G-d and Free will etc. The philosophical and ethical consequences of the Holocaust for understanding the role of G-d and man in the world • free will • role of man • evil • human nature etc. The physical consequences on world Jewry of the Holocaust and the increase of anti-Semitism post-Holocaust Orthodox and Progressive responses to the Holocaust	Cohn-Sherbok, D., (1989) <i>God and the Holocaust</i>, Gracewing; Cromwell Press, Chapter 10 Cohn-Sherbok, D. (1992) <i>Holocaust Theology: A Reader</i>, NYU Press, Parts I and III Cohn-Sherbok, D. (2003), <i>Judaism. History, Belief and Practice</i>, Routledge, Chapters 49–50 Hoffman, C.M. (2010), <i>Teach Yourself: Judaism</i>, Hodder Education, Chapter 16 Trepp, L., (2000) <i>Judaism. Development and Life</i> 4th Edition, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Chapter 9
6. Challenges Chagall: art as resistance	Life of Chagall	1	Chagall • brief introduction to the pre-war Jewish life of Chagall • art education of Chagall. The Nazi campaign against 'art' • classification of degenerate 'art' and fate of those classed as degenerate artists • Chagall as a degenerate artist • the Entartete Kunst exhibit (1937) • the escape of Chagall from the Nazi regime • the role of art as a form of Jewish resistance during the Nazi regime and in the post-war period - Jewish art produced during the war period - Jewish art in the Ghettos and camps - children's art i.e. Terezin.	Commentaries on the prescribed works from Polonsky, G. (2001) <i>Chagall</i>, Phaidon Press Wilson, J. (2009) <i>Marc Chagall</i> (Jewish Encounters Series), Schocken Peters, O. (2014) <i>Degenerate Art: The Attack on Modern Art in Nazi Germany 1937</i>, Prestel Publishing, Pages 16–35 and 106–135 www.het.org.uk – <i>Teaching the Holocaust Through Art</i>

The Holocaust

In this chapter you will learn:

- *about the impact of the Holocaust on Jewish belief*
- *about the purpose of remembering the Holocaust*
- *about the attempts of Jewish theologians to make some sense of the Holocaust.*

Questioning

Most people suffering great pain or loss find themselves asking the question: 'Why?' It is not that they always articulate this. Nor do they necessarily expect anyone to answer their question. Indeed, any answer given would run the serious risk of banality, insensitivity, even cruelty. Rather, the question arises as a protest against something which threatens life's meaning, something which, they believe, just should not be. It has often been said that the death of one child raises the question just as acutely as the death, as in the Holocaust, of a million children. No one can doubt that for those who love that child this is true. For many, however, the Holocaust throws up particularly violently a challenge to meaning. If we believe in the unique value of every human life, then the greater the loss of life the more desperate for an answer we may feel.

There are those, great Jewish thinkers among them, who contend that the Holocaust raises new questions and not just the old questions on a bigger canvas. They argue for the uniqueness of the attempted genocide not only in its scale but also in its cruelty. In particular, they ask the question 'Why?' about the Nazi determination to humiliate and dehumanize Jews, and other groups singled out as inferior, before they killed them. There is debate about whether or not the Holocaust should be described as unique. Knowing in recent years the vicious cruelty and massive 'ethnic cleansing' in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda, and the apparent impotence (some would add indifference) of world powers to prevent it, we perhaps use the word 'unique' reluctantly. If there is a case to be made for its uniqueness, it would seem to rest on the aim of its perpetrators, namely, the total elimination of a race. Certainly it is not helpful to plead superior suffering of the Jews above anyone else's or to satanize Hitler as against other wicked rulers. There is little debate, however, about the fact that the knowledge of the Holocaust does raise immense and, many would say, unanswerable questions. This chapter is concerned with identifying these questions and assessing their importance for the Jewish faith.

THE PURPOSE OF FRANK QUESTIONING

Rabbi Albert Friedlander maintains that it is vital that the questions be asked. Even if, as he believes, there are not sufficient answers to be found for our time, ignoring the questions, not facing up to the evil of Auschwitz, will go on poisoning the atmosphere. Friedlander considers some of the responses made by Jewish theologians, religious leaders, novelists, and psychologists – Orthodox and Progressive. These he calls *Riders towards the Dawn*, the title of his book on the subject published in 1993. These are those who, he says, as Jews, have entered the darkness, many of them having suffered the camps themselves or having lost family there. They are the messengers to whom present-day Jews must listen

if they are 'to move out of the shadow of the Holocaust'. But he thinks that this movement *from ultimate suffering to tempered hope* (the book's subtitle) is incumbent not only on Jews. Indeed, he considers at many points the role of Christians. This is significant for many reasons: first, the part played by the anti-Judaic teaching of Christianity in the rise and culmination of anti-Semitism; second, the contributions in action and theological thought from Christian opponents of Hitler; and third, the need for self-criticism and fresh approaches from present-day Christians if healing is to come.

Friedlander is not alone in wanting to draw non-Jews into the discussion. The British Orthodox rabbi Norman Solomon has written of the duty of theologians and philosophers and of 'ordinary' Jews and Christians to talk about the Holocaust. Honest co-operation on this is, he maintains, essential for the building of a happier future. Certainly, Jews and Christians should be clear about the purpose of such talk. Further causes for hostility abound if Christians display an ignorance of the culpability of the Church in condoning anti-Semitism and, in some cases, fostering it or if Jews simply lay their resentment at the feet of Christian audiences in schools or public meetings. It is surely the responsibility of the leaders and writers of both faith communities not only to communicate the facts but also to find ways forward rather than simply to instil guilt in each other.

Insight

In many countries there is an increased commitment to Holocaust education at various levels. Its avowed purpose is not to apportion blame but to provide accurate information about the Holocaust, especially against the hostility of Holocaust denial. With fewer and fewer survivors to testify, learning the dangers of prejudice and collective violence in a way which educates for the future is essential.

Remembering

There has been considerable disagreement in recent years over the rightness of teaching the Holocaust in schools and colleges.

It is clearly very difficult to strike a balance between making sure people know the facts of the Holocaust, especially in the face of revisionists denying them, and leaving them weighed down with horror and despair. 'Remembering for the Future' was the title given to international conferences on the Holocaust held in Oxford and London in 2000 and to a subsequent publication of essays. It aptly sums up the purpose of researching and teaching the Holocaust. Forgetting is clearly not possible for its survivors.

Nor is it permissible for its perpetrators; neither should it be countenanced for those living since. How best to remember, however, is something which divides Jewish opinion and this division reminds us that there is no single Jewish answer. It is significant that, for 20 years afterwards, very little was said about the Holocaust in theological terms, though there were attempts at artistic and literary expression. Jonathan Sacks describes it as 'a mystery wrapped in silence'. Even those who, since the Eichmann trial in 1961, have written substantively about it are reluctant to call themselves Jewish theologians. Holocaust theology is not a discipline in its own right and no one has written a systematic theology which looks analytically at the event and the diverse responses, offering a coherent and critical account of theological sources. Non-Jews are rightly wary of claiming to understand. But Jews also feel the utter incomprehension of it all. Again, Jonathan Sacks sums it up when he asks both how one could dare to speak and yet how one could dare not to speak on so unfathomable an experience.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS

Yet, the very notion of remembrance is problematic. What is the object of those who built the great museum of the Holocaust in the US and of those who visit it? The same question can be asked of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem which is the 'World Centre for Teaching the Holocaust'. There, educationists, psychotherapists, and others with the necessary skills for such sensitive matters, hold seminars and courses. There, too, world leaders and ordinary tourists are taken when visiting Israel. Few such visitors could fail to be shocked and moved by what they see at Yad Vashem, but remembering, especially for Jews themselves,

goes beyond this. There are Israelis who oppose taking children to Yad Vashem or engaging in its programmes. They ask what children are expected to do with these 'memories' of the Holocaust. Some Jews, of course, in Israel and elsewhere, are generally against what they see as focusing on the past. They fear that it simply recreates resentment and presents the Jew as someone who has been, and, therefore, could well be again, victimized. But hidden resentments are surely more dangerous, as evidenced by the explosion of hatred in Yugoslavia in the 1990s which, far from being sudden and inexplicable, stemmed from the failed 'reconciliation' between ethnic groups of 50 years ago.

There are clearly risks in continued talk about the iniquities of the Holocaust, especially if they are divorced from other manifestations of racism. The frequency with which the subject of the Holocaust comes up in meetings and journals aimed at Christians or Christians and Jews with interfaith interests can backfire. 'Not again' can be the response of those who, having no Jewish experience, find it hard to grasp why it cannot be said to be over and done with. Simon Wiesenthal, for instance, was sometimes criticized as vengeful in his pursuit of Nazi criminals. He and those who support the work of his foundation would maintain otherwise. They see the inadequacy of shelving these crimes against humanity (erroneously referred to as war crimes) for God's later dealings. Rather, justice must be done in the here and now. They also doubt any easy talk of forgiveness, not least because it is doubtful whether 'forgiveness' can be offered by others on behalf of the millions killed. The Centre in Los Angeles, named after Wiesenthal, houses the Museum of Tolerance, and tolerance and compassion are precisely what the Wiesenthal foundation pursues. Justice in the Jewish tradition, and perhaps in other religious traditions, is not the opposite of mercy. Such ancient wrongs cannot simply be forgotten, but require something more concrete and positive.

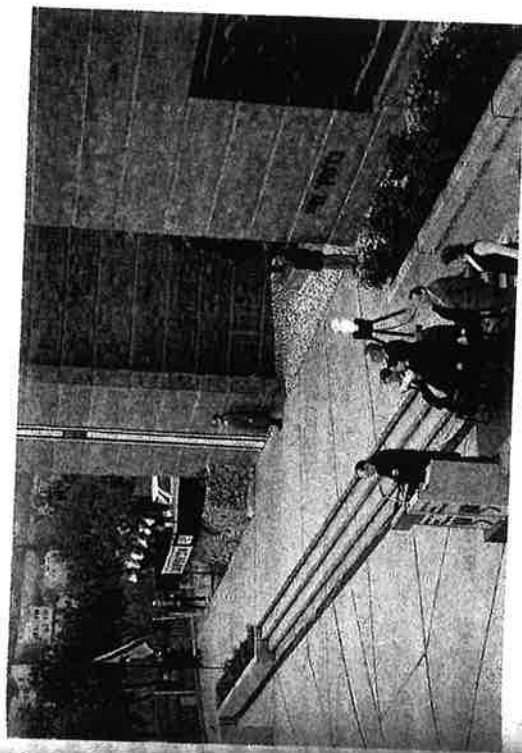


Figure 16.1. The Israeli president speaking at Yad Vashem on Yom Ha-Shoah, 1990.

YOM HA-SHOAH

A clue to why Jews need specifically to 'remember', as if they are likely to forget, perhaps lies in the setting aside of a special day of commemoration, *Yom Ha-Shoah* ('Day of the Shoah'). The Hebrew word, *Shoah*, means 'whirlwind' and the term is more commonly used by Jews than the term 'Holocaust'. Originally called 'The day of Holocaust and heroism', this day was established by the Israeli Parliament in 1951. It is observed annually, on 27 Nisan (the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising) by most Jews, except the Ultra-Orthodox. Since it was declared by a secular body, the Knesset, many Jews (including the present British Chief Rabbi Sacks and his predecessor, Jakobovits) are hesitant about having a special memorial day with special memorial prayers. They would prefer to assimilate remembrance of the Holocaust into the existing fast of Tishah B'Av which commemorates earlier 'destructions', notably of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem.

Insight

Holocaust Memorial Days have been introduced in a range of countries such as the US (held on Yom Ha-Shoah), the UK, Finland, Sweden, and Estonia (27 January, the date Auschwitz was liberated) and France, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Czech Republic (each choosing a date with particular national significance). Although not everyone completely agrees on the nature and purpose of such days, they can provide an educational opportunity for promoting anti-racism, multiculturalism, and pluralism.

CHALLENGES TO JEWISH FAITH

This raises an important question. Should the Holocaust be viewed as one event in Jewish history, albeit extraordinarily great in its destruction, or should it be singled out as unique? This is one of the questions to which theologians address themselves and they arrive at different answers. Perhaps this illustrates the fact that even in what is sometimes described as a post-theological age in Judaism (and in Christianity) essentially the same questions are being asked by the 'ordinary' member of the community as by their theologians. Considering the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish world is a difficult task, not least because there is not one Jewish world but many Jewish worlds. The US, Israel, and east European Jewry constitute just three of the major ones. The sheer physical impact was to wipe out centres of Jewish population and with them their culture, and to concentrate the decimated Jewish population in the US and Israel. The psychological and spiritual impact is much harder to measure. It could be argued, however, that it made certain assaults on faith which are common to Jews of many different communities and of many different religious perspectives, including those who, to all intents and purposes, have thrown off formal religion.

The questions raised, though they may not be expressed in recognizably theological form, do, in fact, cluster around that ancient question 'Why?' They revolve round certain beliefs,

still held, half-held, or reluctantly abandoned, that God is good, that God is powerful, and that he has a special purpose for the Jewish people in the history of the world. One may take the view that the Holocaust is, on its particular combination of facts, unique or one may argue that essentially no radically new theological challenge is posed. Either way, it is undeniable that this immense evil, whether pondered over theologically, or struggled through psychologically, or simply reaching one through a form of popular culture (such as the novel *Schindler's Ark* and the film *Schindler's List*) eats away at the vitals of a belief in a benevolent creator working out his purpose in human history and giving the Jewish people a special role in the scheme of things. The Holocaust, together with the founding of the State of Israel, events powerfully connected in the Jewish imagination, has had an enormous impact on Jewish self-understanding.

In this book, written essentially for non-Jews who are trying to teach themselves about the Jewish faith, the focus for this brief consideration of the Holocaust's impact on Jewish life needs to be the theological tradition. There we see writers trying to wrestle with the very questions which we identified at the start of the chapter. In their varied responses, the theologians represent the main ways in which people have come to terms, theoretically at least, with aspects of the Holocaust. Assimilation, denial of traditional belief to concentrate on a sort of existential Judaism, regarding it as punishment or a way of sanctifying God, are all possibilities expressed by the theologian, the creative artist, and the ordinary believer alike. Some of their main threads repay attention, for these theologians at least try to avoid a general cynicism about God and human beings, not addressing the questions at all, which is surely dangerous as a sort of festering wound. Questions about innocent suffering, divine and human purpose and responsibility arise for all theists but for Jews particularly the questions sharpen. They concern the nature and existence of God, the place of the Holocaust in the history of world Jewry, and the relevance of Jewish belief and practice 'after Auschwitz'. There is the sense that this experience calls into question the three co-efficients of traditional Judaism: God, the Torah, and the people of Israel.

QUESTIONING AND REMEMBERING COMBINED

'Remember' is a key word in Jewish observance. Whether it is on the many festivals or fasts based on historical events or whether it is on the major festival and fast of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, remembering does not comprise simply recalling the past. Rather it entails appreciating the significance of the day. There may be dangers in a box-office hit like *Schindler's List* or even a tour of the first permanent Holocaust Exhibition in Britain (opened at the Imperial War Museum in London in June 2000), but unless we are to retreat into ignorance and apathy, then the realities of the Holocaust need to be presented. For this really to be remembering, however, means going beyond the facts into some sort of exploration into their meaning or, if need be, meaninglessness. The rest of this chapter aims to give some idea of how some writers have attempted to do just that. It is not intended to be a summary of the full range but rather a sample, especially of two writers. These are taken as representing contrasting approaches as they seek to inspire Jewish living after the Holocaust. They are not only presenting Holocaust theologies, but also feeling after post-Holocaust theologies (many of them are still developing), demanding that Jews go beyond the Holocaust so that they do not allow themselves to be permanently imprisoned in it.

Insight

There are other writers who have built on the work of Jewish Holocaust theologians but there are particular challenges for anyone trying to speak meaningfully from outside the Jewish standpoint.

A radical answer

THE 'DEATH' OF GOD

The first and major writer is Richard Rubenstein. (There is a sense in which all the writers after him are coming to terms with the

challenge he presents.) His thought has, in fact, developed over 20 or 30 years as seen in the 1992 edition of *After Auschwitz* subtitled *History, Theology and Contemporary Judaism*. The first edition of this book in 1966 was subtitled *Radical theology and contemporary Judaism*. So radical was it that it caused absolute uproar in his native America, shaking, as it did, the entire foundations of traditional Jewish belief. In reply to the difficulty of reconciling the Holocaust with the notion of a God acting in history, particularly the history of the Jewish people, Rubenstein simply maintains that they are irreconcilable. The biblical image of a saving God has to go. God is rather 'Holy Nothingness'. Hence the title 'death of God' theologian for Rubenstein. In effect, he systematizes the intuition: 'I can no longer believe.' Unlike those who are determined to hang on to a belief in God's covenant by somehow seeing Auschwitz as divine providence and Hitler as an agent of God's punishment (a sort of modern Nebuchadnezzar), he finds it impossible to celebrate Passover with all its assumption of divine concern and intervention.

THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

Rubenstein's argument is that Judaism will survive and people will not follow through the logic of the Holocaust. This is indeed largely what has happened in the Jewish world. For some however, he has coherently articulated what they feel. The focus is no longer God, but rather the community of Israel. Drawing heavily on existentialist writers, he believes that Jews have to create meaning and not assume that existence derives meaning from the divine. He argues for a return to primal origins, for the importance of nature, especially in the land of Israel, and the sanctity of bodily life. In recent years, he has struck a more optimistic note than in 1966, emphasizing a notion of God as ultimate reality rather than as radically transcendent or even non-existent.

Rubenstein's offering people a way of maintaining Jewish identity, one based on religion in the form of rituals and practices but not on theistic faith, has perhaps a certain honesty about it. But there is also surely a dishonesty, or at least an evasion, about

recommending going to synagogue to offer prayers as a sort of group therapy, if one finds the content of the prayers meaningless and moreover one does not believe in a God to whom to pray. He stresses the need to pass on authentic Jewish rites of passage, but is he right in thinking that this is separable from the beliefs therein expressed? Completely secular or social expression of identity would surely make more sense. And yet, there are people who do find value in the ritual while having lost (or maybe never having had) the belief (see Chapters 1 and 17). What he suggests does seem to be true for some, that is, that religion functions psychologically.

DIFFICULTIES WITH RUBENSTEIN'S RESPONSE

There are, however, other difficulties about Rubenstein's solution to the questions. The chief is his evaluation of history and his limited knowledge of the biblical faith. He takes the Shoah as the decisive event of Jewish history. This he takes as conclusive evidence for the non-existence of God. Logically, he should take the founding of the State of Israel, on which he lays so much stress, as equally decisive evidence for God's existence. In the 1992 edition of *After Auschwitz*, Rubenstein does, in fact, draw on the historical events from the Six Day War of 1967 up to the present and there is a new notion of covenant coming through, but still the idea of God entering history is denied. One might reiterate: 'If events destructive of Israel demonstrate the absence of divine providence, what do constructive events demonstrate?' Nor is he right in assuming that his question about God's activity in history is new. The biblical material is more varied than he recognizes. There is at many points (e.g. Jeremiah 12:1) the cry about why the good suffer and the wicked prosper.

Insight

Some contend that the entire Book of Job revolves around this question. If so, it does not provide a convincing answer so much as present the inadequacies of suggested answers for the struggling Job who nonetheless continues to believe in God as the creator, sustainer, and redeemer of the world.

A traditional response

The most significant writer opposing Rubenstein is Eliezer Berkovits and the most cited work is his *Faith after the Holocaust* (1973). He is so determined to counter Rubenstein's radicalism that his theological argument is at times contrived. Some judge that he evades the question raised by Rubenstein by producing a description of the world which, while retaining old certainties, in no way relates to the facts. Others point out that Berkovits himself does not claim to answer the agonizing questions directly but that he gives hope by claiming that future acts of redemption will give answers. He is, after all, concerned with *faith* after the Holocaust and not with statements admitting logical demonstration or verification. The scholar, Steven Katz, says, in *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (New York University Press, 1985), that it is 'to Berkovits's credit that he has formulated several important theological theses that, even if "faith" statements, are suggestive in a Jewish theological context after Auschwitz.' He speaks of his courage in dealing with the 'meaning' and reality of the Shoah and, for all the gaps in his argument, is pointing us 'in the direction of important truths that need further reflection and development'. His conservatism has enabled him to give, writes Katz, 'one of the most theologically and Jewishly convincing "responses" of all those who have taken part in the discussion'.

GOD 'HIDING HIS FACE'

Berkovits starts with the very strain in the biblical tradition which Rubenstein ignores, namely, the protest that God seems to be absent from the experience of the faithful. At the heart of Berkovits's thinking is a verse which, he maintains, celebrates the presence of the God who can and does hide in the world in order to enable human responsibility and freedom: 'Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour' (Isaiah 45:15). The need for God to give space in order for people to develop as moral beings is central to his argument. This 'justification' of evil, the so-called freewill defence, is an ancient and a common

one in both Jewish and Christian thought, but Berkovits makes very particular use of it in relation to the calamities of Jewish experience. God 'must absent himself from history', he writes, and not intervene even when his freedom is grossly misused. But God only appears to be absent. He is nonetheless present as the saving God of Isaiah 45:15. Berkovits refers to certain Psalms of lament which speak of God's 'hiding his face' and this without any human cause such as sin. In Psalm 44:24, for example, the community, after lamenting their suffering and the unfairness of it all cry:

**Why do you hide your face?
Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?**

Berkovits here rejects one of the traditional notions still put forward by some theologians and still held by some, namely, that the Holocaust was a punishment. 'Because of our sins' is the explanation offered for God's hiding his face in some biblical passages, notably Deuteronomy 31:17-18. The prophets of the Hebrew Bible also interpret the destruction of the Temple as punishment for the people's violating the Sinai covenant. Flowing from this is the lingering idea in some people's minds that, in the Holocaust, the ever-just God must be punishing someone for something. Most of these people would be hard-pressed to identify what the 'something' was. Was it unfaithfulness to Judaism in assimilation, secularism, or even Zionism? One would have to be very strenuously opposed to these three things even to contemplate such an equation. Further contradictions arise. How would one explain, for instance, the fact that many of those who perished were the most pious? In *With God in Hell* (1979), Berkovits gives moving testimony to the religious faithfulness of many in the camps. (The book's dedication indicates the personal cost to Berkovits, as it is to his mother, a brother, and two sisters who all perished.) And, more fundamentally, what sins could possibly have merited such appalling 'punishment'?

THE HOLOCAUST AND OLD QUESTIONS ABOUT FAITHFULNESS

Like most Orthodox thinkers, Berkovits does not believe that the Holocaust was unique, except in the 'objective magnitude of

its inhumanity'. He insists that it be seen in the context of history as a whole and the distinctive history of the Jewish people in particular. He here draws on another biblical notion, that of Israel as a suffering servant. In the book of Isaiah, notably in 52:13-53:12, the servant suffers not for his wrongs but for other people's and his suffering is somehow part of God's purpose for the world. Contrary to some other thinkers, Berkovits believes that Israel must not become 'a nation like other nations', powerful and justified in her very survival.

insight

The biblical narrative is, at points, critical of the ancient desire for a monarchy: 'that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles' (1 Samuel 8:20). Prophetic voices still challenge Jews to consider the purposes of Israel's survival within what Judaism understands as God's purposes for the world.

Other elements from biblical and rabbinic responses to suffering in the Jewish tradition explored by Berkovits are *Kiddush Ha-Shem* ('sanctification of the name') and the *akedah* ('binding') of Isaac. *Kiddush Ha-Shem* relates to those who surrender their lives rather than betray their Judaism, the martyrs or *kedoshim* ('holy ones'). But the pious, the convert to Christianity, and the atheist all perished alike in the Holocaust. They were not martyrs, electing to die for their Jewish faith, but victims who died involuntarily because of their Jewish blood. Berkovits and most Jews, though not all, reject *Kiddush Ha-Shem* as having any bearing on the Holocaust. He does apply, however, the ancient story of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22), where Abraham is presented as undergoing a test of faithfulness.

DIFFICULTIES WITH BERKOVITS'S RESPONSE

While there are aspects of Berkovits's response that will ring true to many Jews, the criticisms of it ring true to perhaps many more, and not just those on the Progressive wing of Judaism. Against him, it can be argued, the Nazis took freedom away from the Jews. Thus the freedom of those who chose the good was destroyed by

those who chose the bad. There is further the worrying corollary that if such things as selfless love, forgiveness, fortitude, and faith are unavailable unless they are a reaction to such inhumanity then the Nazi regime was actually assisting Jews in their moral development. It could even follow that yet greater corruption in the future could promote yet greater Jewish virtue. Even if it is accepted that the all-powerful and all-good God could not create people free to do right without creating people free to do wrong, the question arises: 'Is it worth it?' Given the extent of the evil of the Holocaust (and, of course, other times when the results of freedom run riot) might it not be preferable to do without human beings capable of courage and faith?

As do other theologians (such as Fackenheim), Berkovits appeals to the book of Job as offering biblical precedent for someone suffering immense injustice and yet going on believing in God's providence. The parallel is a poor one, however, for Job, unlike the majority of Jews under Hitler, lived to tell the tale, and with all his health and happiness restored. In the 6 million by contrast, all potential for moral growth was destroyed. It is on this ground that some thinkers say that no 'answer' to the Holocaust carries conviction without reference to some sort of afterlife. Berkovits himself concedes:

... all this does not exonerate God for all the suffering of the innocent in history ... There must be a dimension beyond history in which all suffering finds its redemption through God. This is essential to the faith of a Jew.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok thinks that a neglect of Jewish belief in life after death is what is lacking in all the major Holocaust theologians. It could be argued, however, that unless this is very carefully worked out, such belief is simply a crutch, a way of letting God off the hook. There has not yet emerged a thoroughgoing approach to this which avoids the proverbial 'pie in the sky when you die'.

The way in which Berkovits tries to fit the vision of Israel into his vision of the powerlessness of the Jewish people as the suffering

servant carries little conviction. Presenting the State of Israel as the proof of the vindication of the forces of good over evil, light over darkness, contradicts some of his central points. Berkovits's contention that, when Jews suffer historical calamity God is curbing his power so as not to overwhelm human freedom, does not seem to square with his belief that God is at work in the State of Israel. How can God be seen to be at work in the establishment of a human State in 1948, it may also be asked, and centuries ago in the escape from Pharaoh, whose treatment of the children of Israel was far less troublesome than Hitler's? If Israel is the witness to the final judgement of history by a moral God, why could not this witness have come a little earlier? One further wonders what Berkovits would say should the State of Israel be destroyed. Would it be that God was again hiding his face? Logic would surely demand this. He maintains that the exodus was a miracle, a 'one-off' but, by sidelining this event, one which after all is crucial to the Jewish experience, Berkovits ends up with a vision of God and the world which is anything but traditionally Jewish. One of the recurrent dangers for the State of Israel is that some claim theological justification for its existence while ignoring all aspects of the theology. As we shall see in the next chapter, certain brands of Zionism (Jewish and Christian alike) decidedly 'use' God with precious little reference to his will as distinct from theirs.

Survival and beyond

OTHER THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

While Berkovits could be said to exemplify both the best and the worst of suggested lines of thinking for coping with Jewish life after the Holocaust, brief mention should also be made of a number of other contributors. Emil Fackenheim thinks that the attention should not be on any traditional theology or theodicy (reconciling God's power and love with the reality of evil), but on working out how Jews can respond. They should not spend time trying to bail out God's reputation, but concentrate on their obligations.

Insight

Justifying God's ways to human beings is, however, not necessarily at odds with faith and obedience, as seen in Robert Sutherland's literary, legal, and philosophical study from 2004, *Putting God on Trial: The Biblical Book of Job*, which he describes as a provocative theology. Frank Cottrell Boyce's television play of 2008, *God on Trial* (based on an event in Elie Wiesel's *The Trial of God*) centres on prisoners in Auschwitz trying God for abandoning the Jewish people.

In addition to the 613 obligations of the Torah, there is now a 614th mitzvah. There comes from Auschwitz, Fackenheim maintains, a commanding voice to survive and thus not to give Hitler a posthumous victory. Jews are 'forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish'. He too believes that 'the saving God of the past saves still' and he centres his hope on the continued existence of the people of Israel and in Israel. In his later writing, Fackenheim suggests that God is somehow present in the world and people must discern his will in order to 'mend the world'. His thought centres on the idea that the world ruptured at creation, that the spiritual and physical worlds parted company. When Jews fulfil their obligations, they restore the world and bring it back to what God intended.

Representing a new generation of American rabbis, Eugene Borowitz also tries to present a breadth of covenant for those yearning for a faith which can have some meaning after the battering of the Holocaust. His writing reflects his understanding of the complex relationship of Israel to her Palestinian neighbours in trying to work out what it is to 'renew the covenant'. Irving Greenberg urges continued belief in the God of Israel but on new terms, with a covenant, which is voluntary. Ignaz Maybaum tries to build on Fackenheim's insight of God's revelatory voice from Auschwitz by arguing that the State of Israel not only guarantees Jewish survival but also defines the purpose of Jewish existence. Incorporated into this deep faith in progress, however, is the ghastly concept that the Holocaust was essential to bring eastern European Jewry into the modern world.

PSYCHOLOGY AND LITERATURE

From the point of view of trying to understand the struggles of Jews coming to terms with the Holocaust in thought and experience, writers other than theologians have much to offer. Only in the last decade have many Holocaust survivors begun to talk about their experiences in response to their third generation grandchildren. That they are able to, often owes much to the work of psychotherapists. Of great significance is 'logotherapy', which has been called the third great Viennese school of psychoanalysis, as developed by Viktor Frankl. He tells movingly of how he himself discovered meaning precisely in Auschwitz and Dachau where the oppressor sought to deprive the life of the Jew of all meaning and value.

If it is impossible to give, in a few lines, any adequate sense of theologies and psychologies dealing with the subject of the Holocaust, it is even more outrageous to try to capture the thought of a novelist. Yet, it could be argued, when faith is not entirely a matter of reasoned response, it is the novelist who can perhaps help most. Chief among those who have tried is Elie Wiesel. In a series of novels, published first in French and then in English, Wiesel speaks for the millions of murdered Jews and for the silent survivors. He also depicts the Jewish tragedy as a paradigm of the universal human experience. Using biblical and Hasidic (his own background in Hungary) tales, his novels have four main interwoven themes: witness, silence, laughter, and dialogue. But the theology which comes through his stories imposes no systematic structure. It is rather full of great tension and has thus enabled people to talk more honestly about their experience of the Holocaust and its impact on faith.

Insight

We see this in the contrasting lines of Wiesel's bestselling memoir, *Night*, 'I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone – terribly alone in a world without God and without man' and in his *First Person Singular*: 'a Jew ... can be ... with God or against God but never without God.'

In an essay on belief, Wiesel refers to his childhood certainty that the world was intelligible in terms of God's providential intervention in human affairs. He would recite the 13 principles of Maimonides, including the last one which affirms belief in the coming of the Messiah 'even though he tarry'. But, he says, an abyss separates him from the child he once was. The last festival he celebrated at home before he experienced Auschwitz was Passover. But, he asks, how does one read the story of Passover after Auschwitz? How does one celebrate the festival of Purim in which God intervenes to deflect a wicked plan? Judaism is shot through with the notion of holy history, where clear explanations are offered for exile in terms of punishment, where God hears prayers to deliver travellers.

In an age where traditional theology is under attack for many reasons besides the Holocaust, it is not surprising that some judge asking the questions to be more fitting than suggesting answers. There certainly is no satisfactory system of explanations. But the writers touched on in this chapter have sought those aspects of their tradition, which they believed could support them and their fellow Jews in a sceptical pluralistic age. Chaim Bermant seems to resent the faith of these 'riders towards the dawn'. In *The Jewish Chronicle* of 31 December 1993 he writes: 'It must be good to be God, for the Orthodox give Him the benefit of their certainties, and the Liberals the benefit of their doubts.'

It must be said, however, that both those with the certainties and those with the doubts still struggle to find a response which is at the same time honest and sustaining.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- ▶ For Jews, the Holocaust raises immense, perhaps unanswerable, questions about their belief in an all-powerful, all-loving God who has given them, as a people, a particular role in the world.
- ▶ After a long silence in the wake of such suffering, there is now much attention given both to honest questioning and to remembering.
- ▶ In Israel, there is a huge memorial complex called Yad Vashem and a special day of commemoration called Yom Ha-Shoah.
- ▶ Holocaust museums and other memorial days exist in many countries, both to commemorate the dead and to educate the living.
- ▶ To 'remember' in Judaism means not only to present the facts but also to explore their meaning or even their meaninglessness.
- ▶ Whatever the Holocaust means for people of other faiths or none, for Jews it calls into question the three co-efficients of traditional Judaism: God, the Torah, and the people of Israel.
- ▶ Theologians have made attempts to address the spiritual challenge of the Holocaust. They range from Rubenstein's radical response, focused not on God but on the Jewish community, to Berkovits's traditional answer, stressing the role of freewill in God's providential plan.
- ▶ Many writers, theological, psychological, and literary, continue to explore the issues which the Holocaust raises and to suggest ways in which Jews can reaffirm the purpose of their existence.

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CHAPTER 46

The Rise of Anti-Semitism

Timeline:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1860–1905 Theodor Herzl | 1893 Anti-Semitic parties gain 250,000 votes in Germany |
| 1878 Adolf Stoecker establishes the Christian Social Party | 1894–1899 Dreyfus Affair in France |
| 1879–1881 Anti-Semitic movement in Germany | 1895 Karl Lueger uses anti-Semitic slogans. Elected mayor of Vienna |
| 1881 Alexander II assassinated | 1899 Houston Stewart Chamberlain publishes <i>The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century</i> |
| 1881 Russian pogroms | 1903 Pogrom against Jews in Kishinev |
| 1881 Beginning of mass immigration of Eastern European Jews to the United States | 1905 Publication of the <i>Protocols of the Elders of Zion</i> |
| 1884 Kattowitz Conference of the Lovers of Zion | 1905–1907 Pogroms in Russia |
| 1887 Quotas on Jews in general Russian schools and universities | 1911–1913 Beilis blood libel case |
| 1891 Expulsion of Jews from Moscow | |

By the last decades of the nineteenth century the European Jewish community had attained a high degree of emancipation. Nevertheless, political conditions in Europe after 1870 brought about considerable disruption: several proud and independent nations emerged and fought against indigenous minority groups which threatened their homogeneity. Living in such conditions Jews were viewed as aliens and unassimilable. Symptomatic of such attitudes was the invention of the term 'anti-Semitism' by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in the 1870s. Previously Jewish persecution was based largely on religious grounds but Marr's concept of anti-Semitism focused on biological descent. Anti-Semitism was thus a racial doctrine which significantly differed from previous dislike of Jews and Judaism. According to Marr, the Jews had corrupted all standards, banned idealism from society, dominated commerce, and ruled cultural

life. In Marr's opinion there is a continuous struggle in modern society between these Semitic aliens and native Teutonic stock.

Anti-Jewish attitudes intensified in the 1870s in Germany as a result of economic and cultural upheaval. The political liberalism of previous decades had enabled Jews to benefit from economic activities, and in reaction conservatives blamed the Jewish community for the ills besetting society. In 1878 Adolf Stoecker founded a Christian Social Party on the basis of an anti-Semitic platform. By accusing the press and the financial institutions of being controlled by Jewish interests, many artisans, shopkeepers, clerks and professionals were attracted to his political movement.

Such allegations were also supported by German nationalists who emphasized that Jews would need to assimilate to German life before they could be accepted as Germans. Other nationalists adopted a more radical

position: in 1881 for example Eugen Dühring argued that the Jewish type constitutes a biological threat to the German nation. In the same year anti-Semites presented a petition of 225,000 signatures to stop all Jewish immigration; this was followed in 1882 by an international anti-Semitic congress. In the next decade anti-Semitic parties elected sixteen deputies to the German Reichstag. At the end of the century anti-Semitism was utilized by Karl Lueger to foster the creation of the first political party in Europe which obtained power on the basis of anti-Jewish feeling.

During this period French anti-Semitism was also used by the monarchy and clergy who were unhappy with the liberal ideas of the French Revolution. Such anti-Semitism reached a climax with the Dreyfus Affair. Accused of treason, Alfred Dreyfus was banished from the army and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1894. Subsequently, however, it was discovered that forged evidence had been used to implicate Dreyfus and a scandal ensued which divided public opinion. Those opposed to Dreyfus believed that he was part of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine the military and discredit France; his supporters viewed the court martial of Dreyfus as an injustice which threatened the stability of French life. Eventually Dreyfus was pardoned, but for many Jews this episode illustrated that despite the forces of emancipation, anti-Semitism was deeply rooted in European society. In a tract written after the Dreyfus affair, Theodor Herzl (1867–1905) came to the conclusion that Jews would never be accepted in the countries where they lived. According to Herzl, even though Jews seek to integrate into those societies where they live, they will never be accepted as equals: the only solution to the Jewish problem is for Jews to have their own homeland.

In Russia anti-Semitism became an official policy of the state. After Alexander II was assassinated in 1881, a succession of pogroms against the Jewish population took place in the southern Ukraine. Jewish property was looted and destroyed, and in 1882 the minister of the interior decreed a series of laws which curtailed Jewish residence in the Pale of Settlement. In the later 1880s quotas were imposed on the admittance of Jews to Russian schools, universities and professions. In addition more than 20,000 Jews were expelled from Moscow in 1891–2. In 1903 a violent pogrom was unleashed on the Jews of Kishinev. In the next year

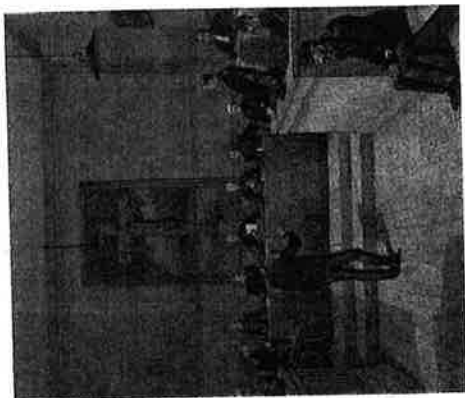


Figure 46 Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935). French army officer before the war council, December 1854. Engraving from French publication *Le Petit Journal*. Copyright The Art Archive/Dagli Orti.

Jews were accused of helping the enemy in the war against Japan and armed gangs attacked Jews in various towns and cities. Though these outbreaks ceased in 1907 a right-wing political party, the Union of the Russian People, initiated a campaign of anti-Semitic propaganda. In 1911 Mendel Beilis, a Jew from Kiev, was accused of ritual murder but was exonerated in 1913.

Such manifestations of anti-Jewish sentiment were based on the belief that the Jewish people constitute a dangerous racial group. Ideologues argued that the Semitic mentality is egoistic, materialistic, economically minded, cowardly and culturally degenerate. In this context a number of writers propagated racist theories. In *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published at the turn of the century, Houston Stewart Chamberlain maintained that the antiquity and the mobility of the Jewish nation illustrates that the confrontation between superior Aryans and parasitic Semites is the central theme of history. Earlier, in the 1880s, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were believed

to be the minutes of a clandestine world government. In this document the elders were depicted as attempting to strengthen their hold over the European economy, the press, and the parties opposed to the Tsar as well as other autocratic regimes.

SOURCES

Wilhelm Marr

Wilhelm Marr was a racial anti-Semite whose pamphlet, *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism: Regarded from a Denominational Point of View* compared the Jew with the German:

Jewry's control of society and politics, as well as its practical domination of religious and ecclesiastical thought, is still in the prime of its development . . .

By now, a sudden reversal of this process is fundamentally impossible, for if it were the entire social structure, which has been so thoroughly Judaized, would collapse, and there is no viable alternative to this social structure which could take its place . . . We were vanquished, and it is entirely proper that the victor shouts 'Vae Victis!'

German culture has proved itself ineffective and powerless against this foreign power. This is a fact; a brute inexorable fact. State, Church, Catholicism, Protestantism, Creed and Dogma, all are brought low before the Jewish tribunal . . .

The Jews were late in their assault on Germany, but once they started there was no stopping them . . .

Wilhelm Marr, *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, in *JMW*, pp. 331–332.

Eugen Dühring

An economist and philosopher, Eugen Dühring was an earlier proponent of modern racial anti-Semitism:

A Jewish question would still exist, even if every Jew were to turn his back on his religion and join one of our major churches. Yes, I maintain that in that case, the struggle between us and the Jews would make itself felt as ever more urgent – although the struggle certainly is felt now even when the Jews have yet to convert (in large numbers). It is precisely the baptized Jews who infiltrate furthest, unhindered in all sectors of society and political life. It is as though they have provided themselves with an unrestricted passport, advancing their stock to those places

where members of the Jewish religion are unable to follow. Furthermore, several doors are closed to members of the Jewish religion by our legislation, and more particularly, by the principles of our administration. Through these portals the racial Jew, who has forsaken his religion, can enter unhindered . . . I return therefore to the hypothesis that the Jews are to be defined solely on the basis of race, and not on the basis of religion.

(Eugen Dühring, *The Question of the Jew is a Question of Race*, in *JMW*, pp. 333–334)

Houston Stewart Chamberlain

British by origin, Houston Stewart Chamberlain espoused racial anti-Semitism in *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*.

We live today in a 'Jewish age'; we may think what we like about the past history of the Jews: their present history actually takes up so much room in our own history that we cannot possibly refuse to notice them. Herder in spite of his outspoken humanism had expressed the opinion that 'the Jewish people is and remains in Europe an Asiatic people alien to our part of the world, bound to that old law which it received in a distant climate, and which according to its own confession it cannot do away with'. Quite correct. But this alien people, everlastingly alien, because – as Herder well remarks – it is indissolubly bound to an alien law that is hostile to all other peoples – this alien people has become precisely in the course of the nineteenth century a

disproportionately important and in many spheres actually dominant constituent of our life. Even a hundred years ago that same witness had sadly to confess that the 'runder nations of Europe' were 'willingly slaves of Jewish usury'; today he could say the same of by far the greatest part of the civilized world. The possession of money in itself is, however, of least account: our governments, our law, our science, our commerce, our literature, our art . . . particularly all branches of our life have become more or less willing slaves of the Jews.

(Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, in JMW, pp. 358–359)

DISCUSSION

1. How did modern anti-Semitism differ from anti-Semitism of previous centuries?
2. Critically evaluate the theories of racism propounded by nineteenth century thinkers.

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DISCUSSION

1. What was the nature of immigrant Jewish life in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century?
2. Discuss the nature of Jewish life in Palestine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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CHAPTER 49

The Nazi Regime

Timeline:

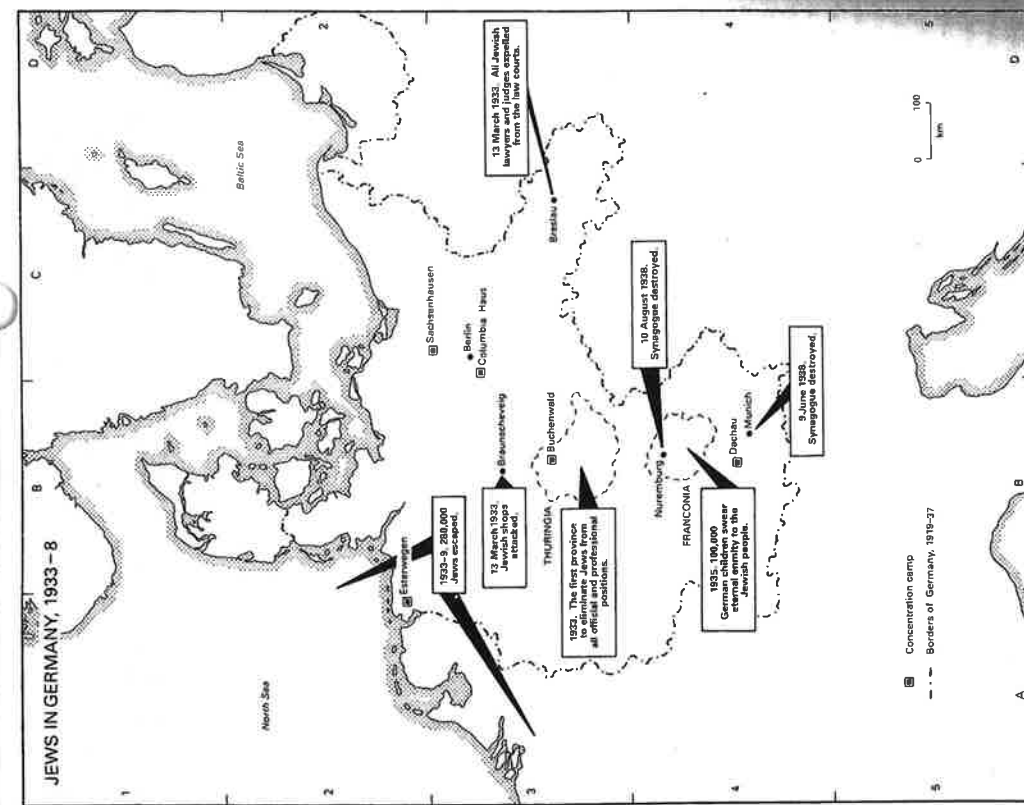
- 1933 Hitler appointed Chancellor. Nazi boycott of Jewish businesses
- 1935 Nuremberg Laws
- 1938 Kristallnacht
- 1939 Invasion of Poland
- 1940 Ghettos established in eastern Europe
- 1941 Invasion of Russia
- 1942 Wannsee Conference
- 1942-1944 Extermination camps established

After the First World War Germany flourished as a federal republic, but the depression of 1930-32 brought about massive unemployment. As a consequence extremist parties gained considerable support forcing the government to rule by presidential decree. After several unsuccessful conservative coalitions, the president, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, appointed the leader of the National Socialist Workers' Party (the Nazi Party), Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) as chancellor. The ideology of the Nazi party was based on German nationalism, anti-capitalism and anti-Semitism. According to Hitler, the Jews were responsible for Germany's defeat in the war as well as the economic and cultural decline of the post-war period. In addition the Bolshevik victory in Russia was portrayed as part of a Jewish plot for world domination. To combat the plans of international Jewry, Hitler believed it was necessary for Germany to gain control over a vast empire in which Aryan supremacy could be ensured.

Once the Nazis gained control of the government, they pursued these racist objectives by curtailing civil liberties. In 1933 all political parties were eliminated; strikes were forbidden; and trade unions were dissolved. The arrest of dissident scholars and scientists was followed by a purge of the party's radicals. During the next few years Jews were eliminated from the civil service, the legal and medical professions, and cultural

and educational institutions. In September 1935 the Nuremberg Laws made Jews into second-class inhabitants, and all marriage and sexual liaisons were described as crimes against the state. In 1938 Jewish communal bodies were put under the control of the Gestapo, and Jews were forced to register their property. Later in the year the Nazi party organized an onslaught against the Jewish population in which Jews were murdered and Jewish property was destroyed. This event, known as Kristallnacht, was a prelude to the Holocaust which brought about a new stage of modern Jewish history.

With the first phase of war, pressure on Jews in Germany increased. From September 1939 Jews had to be off the streets by 8.00 p.m.; their movements were restricted; they were banned from various types of transport and deprived of the use of the telephone. From December 1939 Jewish ration cards were cut and Jews were restricted to specific shopping hours. The Nazis' plan for the elimination of the Jews proceeded in stages. Initially thousands of Jews were deported or put into forced labour camps which frequently led to their death. But in 1941 when the invasion of Russia was imminent, rumours began to circulate that Hitler had entrusted Reinhard Heydrich with the preparation of a Final Solution to the Jewish problem. On 30 July 1940 Hermann Göring, who was in charge of the



Map 63 Jews in Germany, 1933-1938

German economy, had ordered Reinhard Heydrich to take all preparatory measures required for the final solution of the Jewish question in the European territories under German influence. Heydrich himself revealed the Final Solution to staff members at the Wannsee conference on 20 January 1942 in the office of the International Criminal Police Commission outside Berlin. The war with Russia, he explained, made the plan of deporting all Jews an impossibility. The only alternative was extermination.

The first stage of the Nazis' plan for European Jewry had already begun with the invasion of Poland. In September 1939 Hitler decided to incorporate much of Poland into Germany, and move more than 600,000 Jews into a central area ('General Government'). When the Jewish population was ghettoized into what Hitler referred to as a huge Polish labour camp, a massive work programme was initiated. Here Jews worked all day, seven days a week, dressed in rags and fed on bread, soup and potatoes. This slave-labour operation was a form of murder; the phrase 'destruction through work' was used repeatedly in discussions between Georg Thierack, Joseph Goebbels, and Heinrich Himmler in September 1942.

According to Rudolf Hess, the commandant at Auschwitz, by the end of 1944 about 400,000 slaves worked in the German armaments industry. These workers had no names, only numbers tattooed on their bodies; if one died a replacement was sought without

any inquest into the cause of death. Yet working Jews to their graves was not sufficient for the Nazi regime; what was needed was a plan of mass extermination which began with the invasion of Russia in 1941. This was designed to destroy the centre of what was described by the Nazis as the 'Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy'.

At first mobile killing battalions of 500-900 men (the *Einsatzgruppen*) under the supervision of Heydrich began the slaughter of Russian Jewry. Of the 4,500,000 Jews who resided in Soviet territory, more than half fled before the German invasion; those who remained were concentrated in large cities making it easier for Heydrich's troops to carry out their task. Throughout the country the *Einsatzgruppen* moved into Russian towns, sought out the rabbi or Jewish council and obtained a list of all Jewish inhabitants. The Jews were then rounded up in market places, crowded into trains, buses and trucks and taken to the woods where mass graves had been dug. They were then machine-gunned to death. In this slaughter some Jews attempted to escape the onslaught by hiding under floorboards and cellars, but they were buried alive or blasted out with grenades. A few girls offered themselves to stay alive; they were used during the night but killed the next morning. In the initial sweep between October and December 1941, these troops killed over 300,000 Jews; in a second stage that lasted throughout 1942 over 900,000 were murdered.

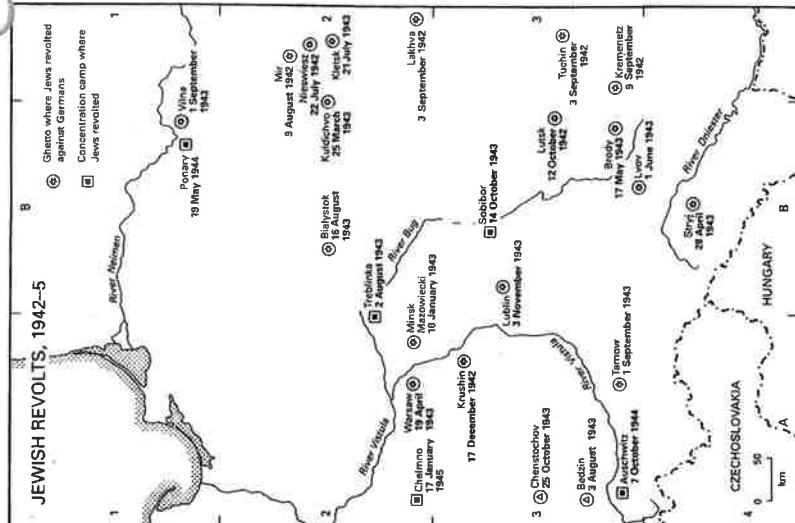
SOURCES

Hitler and the Jews

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler described his growing awareness of Jewry once he lived in Vienna:

Once, as I was strolling through the inner city, I suddenly encountered an apparition in a black caftan and black hair locks. Is this a Jew? was my first thought. For, to be sure, they had not looked like that in Linz. I observed this man furtively and cautiously, but the longer I stared at this foreign face, scrutinizing feature for feature, the more my first question assumed a new form: Is this a German?

(Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, in UH, p. 29)



Map 65 Jewish revolts, 1942-1945

The SS

In the creation of the Third Reich, the SS played an increasingly important role. Eventually it became a party police force, a regular army within the army. Infiltrating every aspect of German life, it spread its tentacles throughout the nation. The principles of selection to the SS embodied the values espoused by the Nazi regime, as Heinrich Himmler explained in a speech delivered in 1935:

The first principle for us was and is the recognition of the values of blood and selection . . . We went about it like a seedsmen who, wanting to improve the strain of a good old

variety which has become crossbred and lost its vigour, goes through the fields to pick up the best plants . . . The nature of the selection process was to concentrate on the choice of those who came physically closest to the ideal of the Nordic man . . . The second principle and virtue which we tried to instill in the SS and to give it an indelible characteristic for the future is the will to freedom and a fighting spirit . . . The third principle and virtue are the concepts of loyalty and honour . . . The fourth principle and virtue that is valid for us is obedience, which does not hesitate for a moment but unconditionally follows every order which comes from the Führer or is legitimately given by a superior.

(Heinrich Himmler, *Speech at the Reich Peasant Congress*, in UH, p. 66)

Kristallnacht

On 10 November 1938 anti-Jewish demonstrations took place throughout Germany during which Jewish shops were demolished and synagogues set on fire. A witness to this assault in Leipzig was the American Consul David Buffum who described this attack on the Jewish community:

The shattering of shop windows, looting of stores likely anywhere else in the world since savagery and dwellings of Jews which began in the early hours of 10 November 1938 was hailed subsequently in the contents demolished or looted. In one of the Jewish Nazi press as a 'spontaneous wave of righteous sections an 18-year-old boy was hurled from a third-indignation throughout Germany, as a result of the storey window to land with both legs broken on a cowardly Jewish murder of Third Secretary von Rath street littered with burning beds and other household in the German Embassy at Paris. . . . At 3 a.m. on furniture and effects from his family and apartments. 10 November 1938 was unleashed a barrage of Nazi (David Buffum, *Nuremberg Document*, in UH, p. 97) ferocity as had no equal hitherto in Germany, or very

The Ghetto

The largest ghetto created by the Nazis was in Warsaw. One of those who visited the Warsaw ghetto provided a chilling account of its residents:

The majority are nightmare figures, ghosts of former human beings, miserable destitutes, pathetic remnants of former humanity. One is most affected by the characteristic change which one sees in their faces: as a result of misery, poor nourishment, the lack of vitamins, fresh air and exercise, the numerous cares, worries, anticipated misfortunes, suffering and sickness, their faces have taken on a skeletal appearance. The prominent bones around their eye sockets, the yellow facial colour, the slack pendulous skin, the alarming emaciation and sickeness. And, in addition, this miserable frightened, restless, apathetic and resigned expression, like that of a hunted animal. I pass my closest friends without recognizing them and guessing their fate. Many of them recognize me, come up to me and ask curiously how things are 'over there' behind the walls - where there is enough fresh air, freedom to move around, and above all freedom . . .

On the streets children are crying in vain, children who are dying of hunger. They howl, beg, sing, moan, shiver with cold, without underwear, without clothing, without shoes, in

The Assault Against Russia

A typical example of the horror that took place throughout Russia occurred in the city of Lvov shortly after the German invasion. At the beginning of the German occupation, Ukrainian mobs murdered Jews wherever they were found. A witness to this onslaught recalled the scene in the yard of a police station where more than 5,000 Jews had been gathered:

Thousands of men were lying here in rows. They lay on their bellies, their faces buried in the sand. Around the perimeter of the field searchlights and machine guns had been set up. Among them I caught sight of German officers standing about. We were ordered to lie flat like the others. We were pushed and shoved brutally, this way and that. My father was separated from me, and I heard him calling out in despair: 'Let me stay with my son! I want to die with my son!' Nobody took any notice of him.

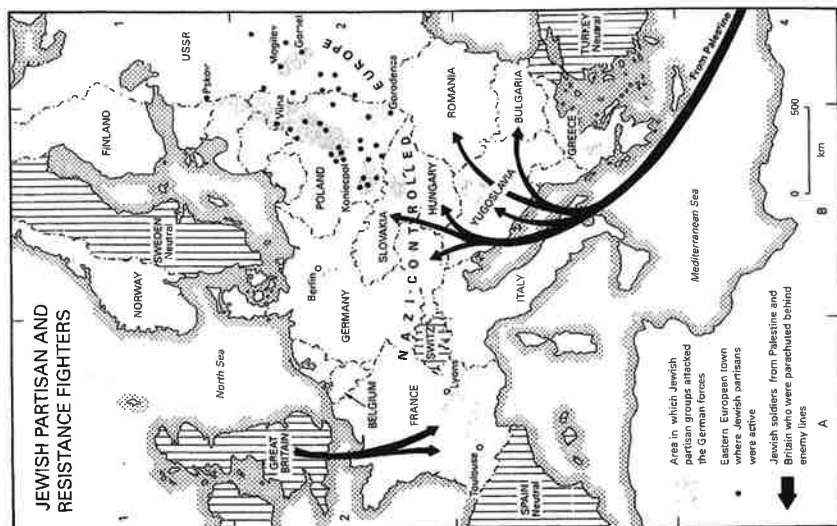
Now that we were all lying still, there was a hush that lasted for a moment or two. Then the 'game' started. We could hear the sound of a man, clearly one of us, stumbling awkwardly around, chased and beaten by another as he went. At last the pursued collapsed out of sheer exhaustion. He was told to rise. Blows were rained down upon him until he dragged himself to his feet again and tried to run forward. He fell to the ground again and tried to run forward. He fell to the ground again and hadn't the strength to get up. When the pursuers were at

last satisfied that the incessant blows had rendered him unable to stir, let alone run, they called a halt and left him there. Now it was the turn of the second victim. He received the same treatment.

Thoughts raced in disorder and confusion through my mind. I was so exhausted that I fell asleep. Not even the agonizing screams, the sound of savage blows, or the continual trampling on our bodies could prevent me any longer from sinking into oblivion.

The welcome state of unconsciousness passed all too quickly. I came to, and was startled by a painful stab of dazzling light. Powerful searchlights were focused on us. We sat up, one beside the other, so close that we could not stir. Directly in front of me sat two men with shattered skulls. Through the mess of bone and hair I could see the very brains. We whispered to them. We nudged them. But they did not stir. They just sat there, propped up by bulging eyes staring ahead. They were quite dead.

(Leon Weliczker Wells, *Eichmann Trial*, in UH, pp. 140–141)



Map 66 Jewish partisan and resistance fighters

ragged, swollen, flannel which are bound in strips round the emaciated skeletons, children of five, gloomy and weary of life. They are like old people and are only conscious of one thing: 'I'm cold', 'I'm hungry'. They have become aware of the most important things in life that quickly. Through their innocent sacrifice and their frightening helplessness the thousands upon thousands of these little beggars level the main accusation against the proud civilization today.

(Stanislaw Rozycki, *Description of the Warsaw Ghetto*, UH, pp. 127–128)

DISCUSSION

1. What was the nature of Jewish life in Germany once Hitler became Chancellor?
2. Discuss the racist ideology of the Nazi state and its effect on Jews.

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CHAPTER 50

The Death Camps

Timeline:

- 1942 Wannsee Conference
- 1942–1944 Extermination camps established in Chelmo, Auschwitz, Belzec, Sobibor, Majdanek, Treblinka
- 1943 Warsaw ghetto uprising

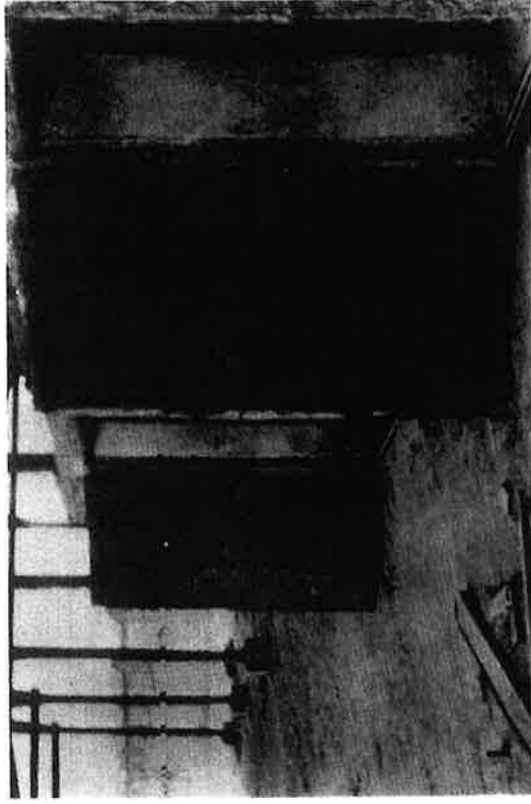


Figure 50 Door to the gas chamber at the Majdanek concentration camp. Copyright Imperial War Museum, London.

Other methods were also employed by the Nazis. Mobile gas vans were sent to each battalion of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Meanwhile these mobile killing operations were being supplemented by the use of fixed centres, the death camps. Six of these were at Chelmno and Auschwitz in the Polish territories, and at Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and Belzec in the Polish 'General Government'. Construction of this mass-murder industry began in 1941. Two civilians from Hamburg went to Auschwitz to teach the staff how to use Zyklon-B gas. In September 1941 the first gassing took place in Auschwitz Block II; then work began on Birkenau, the central killing centre in Auschwitz. The first death camp to be completed was Chelmno near Lodz which started functioning in December 1941. Subsequently Belzec became operational, and the building of Sobibor began in March 1942. At the same time Majdanek and Treblinka were transformed into death centres.

The eradication of the Jews in western Europe (as opposed to the destruction of Polish and Russian Jewry) was the private preserve of Adolf Eichmann. In 1942 he decided to send 100,000 Jews from the Greater Reich (Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia) to Poland where they were gassed at Belzec and Majdanek. By the end of 1943 the majority of Jews from the Greater Reich were killed: 180,000 from Germany; 60,000 from Austria; and 243,000 from Czechoslovakia. The deportation of Jews in countries west and south of Poland was on an equally massive scale. Out of a population of 140,000 Dutch Jews, 110,000 were deported to Auschwitz and Sobibor to be exterminated between 1941 and 1942. During this period 25,000 Belgian Jews, 50,000 Yugoslav Jews and 80,000 Greek Jews perished in the death camps.

Until the summer of 1942 Jewish deportees from central and western Europe were divided equally between Auschwitz and the other death camps, but in August 1942 Himmler decided that Auschwitz should become the central extermination centre for western Europe. At its fullest capacity it held 140,000 inmates and its five crematoria could burn 10,000 bodies each day. Those who escaped the gassing engaged in forced

labour for twelve to fourteen hours a day surviving on a watery turnip soup until they became living corpses.

Though nearly all of European Jewry had no other option but to succumb to Nazi terror without resistance, there were some Jews who revolted against the Germans. In the summer of 1942 a young Zionist, Mordecai Anielewicz, persuaded the Jewish leaders of the Warsaw ghetto that resistance offered the only possibility of survival. Underground shelters and bunkers were constructed; money was raised from Jewish capitalists; revolvers and grenades were purchased. By the autumn of 1942 the Jewish resistance had become a powerful force.

By January of the next year Himmler visited the Warsaw ghetto and issued the order for a final eradication of the remaining Jews: in April SS Major-General Jürgen Stroop arrived to put this operation into effect. When the 2,000 SS troops moved into position, they were attacked from rooftops. In response the Nazis bombarded buildings and systematically levelled the places where Jews were hiding. In the sewers and shelters the Jews continued their resistance. Jewish patrols disguised in German uniforms ventured out to capture arms and rations; grenades and molotov cocktails were tossed at German troops and tanks. The SS retaliated with dynamite and gas shells, flooded the sewers and released police dogs.

In the face of such a powerful enemy the Jewish community in Europe was doomed to mass destruction. Nearly 9 million Jews were resident in European countries under German control. Of those it is estimated that the Nazis killed about 6 million. In Poland more than 90 per cent were killed. The same percentage of the Jewish population died in the Baltic States, Germany and Austria. More than 70 per cent were murdered in the Bohemian protectorate, Slovakia, Greece and the Netherlands. More than 50 per cent were killed in White Russia, the Ukraine, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Romania and Norway. The six major death camps constituted the main areas of killing: over 2,000,000 died at Auschwitz; 1,380,000 at Majdanek; 800,000 at Treblinka; 600,000 at Belzec; 340,000 at Chelmno; and 250,000 at Sobibor.

SOURCES

The Wannsee Conference

The Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942 in a villa outside Berlin discussed the Final Solution to the Jewish problem. In his trial in 1950 Adolf Eichmann described this event:

What I know is that the gentlemen sat together, and then in very blunt terms – not in the language that I had to use in the minutes, but in very blunt terms – they talked about the matter without any circumlocution. I certainly could not have remembered that; if I had not recalled saying to myself at the time: look just look at Stuckert, who was always regarded as a legal pedant, punctilious and fussy, and now what

a different tone! The language being used here was very unlegalistic. I should say that this is the only thing from all this that has still stuck clearly in my mind... The talk was of killing, elimination, and annihilation.

(Adolf Eichmann, *The Wannsee Conference*, in UH, p. 749).

Deportation

As deportations took place throughout Europe, rumours constantly circulated about what fate awaited those who travelled eastward. An observer of these events noted:

There is great unhappiness and fear among the Jews. From everywhere comes the news about the incredible violence against the Jews. They are bringing trainloads of Jews from Czechoslovakia, Germany and even from Belgium. They are also resettling the Jews from various towns and villages and taking them somewhere towards Belzec. Today I heard a story about what they did to the Jews in Lublin. It is difficult to believe it's true. Today they deported Jews from Izbica – they were also taken to Belzec where there is supposed to be some monstrous camp...

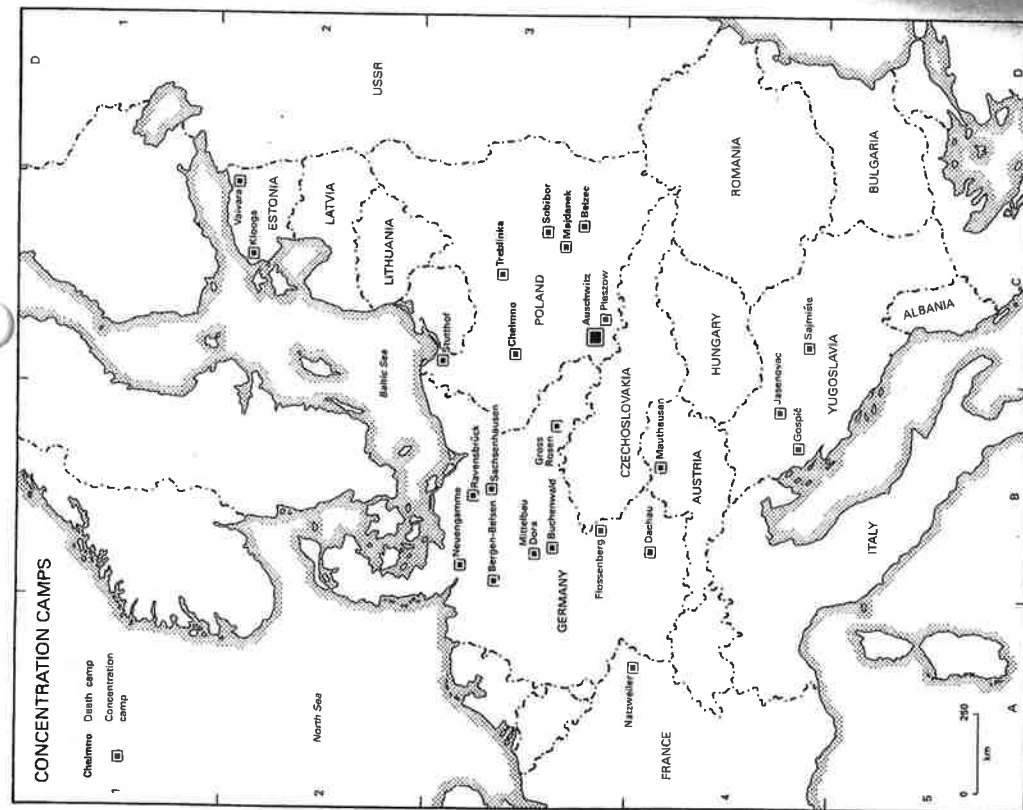
Or the way to Belzec people can see horrifying scenes – especially the railwaymen – because the Jews know very well why they are being taken there, and on the journey they are given neither food nor water. On the station in Szczepaszyn the railwaymen could see with their own eyes, and hear with their own ears Jews offering 150 zlotys for a kilo of bread, and a Jewess took off a gold ring from her finger and offered it in exchange for a glass of water for her dying child.

(Zygmunt Klukowski, *Description of the Deportations*, in UH, pp. 156–57).

Arrival at the Camps

When trains arrived at the camps, terrible scenes took place. According to one of the deportees from Lvov to Belzec, the entire area of the camp was occupied by the SS:

The train entered a yard which measured about one kilometre by one kilometre and was surrounded by barbed wire and fencing about two metres high, which was not electrified. Entry to the yard was through a wooden gate covered with barbed wire. Next to the gate there was a guard house with a telephone and standing in front of the guard house were several SS men with dogs. When the train entered the yard the SS men closed the gate and went into the guard house. At that moment, dozens of SS men opened the doors of the wagons shouting 'Out!' They pushed people out with their



Map 67 Concentration camps

whips and rifles. The doors of the wagons were about one metre from the ground. The people hurried along with blows from whips, were forced to jump down, old and young alike, it made no difference.

They broke arms and legs, but they had to obey the orders of the SS men.

(Rudolf Reder, *Belzec* in UH, p. 159)

Once Jews had arrived at Belzec, they were told that they were going to the bath house and then would be sent to work. Fearing the worst, they were filled with hope:

The women went about 200 metres farther on – to a large barrack hut which measured about 30 metres by 15 metres. There they had their heads shaved, both women and girls. They entered, not knowing what for. There was silence and calm. Later, I knew that only a few minutes after entering, they were asked to sit on wooden stools across the barrack hut, and Jewish barbers, like automatons, as silent as the grave, came forward to shave their heads. Then they understood the whole truth, none of them could have

any doubts any more. All of them – everyone – except a few chosen craftsmen – were going to die. The girls with long hair went to be shaved, those who had short hair went with the men – straight into the gas chambers. Suddenly there were cries and tears, a lot of women had hysterics. Many of them went cold-bloodedly to their deaths, especially the young girls...

(Rudolf Reder, *Description of the Arrival at Belzec*, in UH, p. 160)

Burial

Members of the *Sonderkommando* of about 500 Jews who were selected from previous transports were responsible for burying the dead at Belzec:

We dug huge mass graves and dragged bodies. We used spades, but there was also a mechanical excavator which dug up the sand and piled it into mounds and later covered over the graves already full of bodies. About 450 of us worked at the graves. It took a week to dig one pit.

The most horrible thing for me was that there was an order to pile the bodies up to a level one metre

above the edge of the graves, and then cover them with a layer of sand, while thick black blood flowed out and flooded the ground like a lake. We had to walk along the ledges from one pit to the next, and our feet were soaked with our brothers' blood. We walked over their bodies and that was even worse.

(Rudolf Reder, *Description of Graves*, in UH, p. 160)

SS Doctors

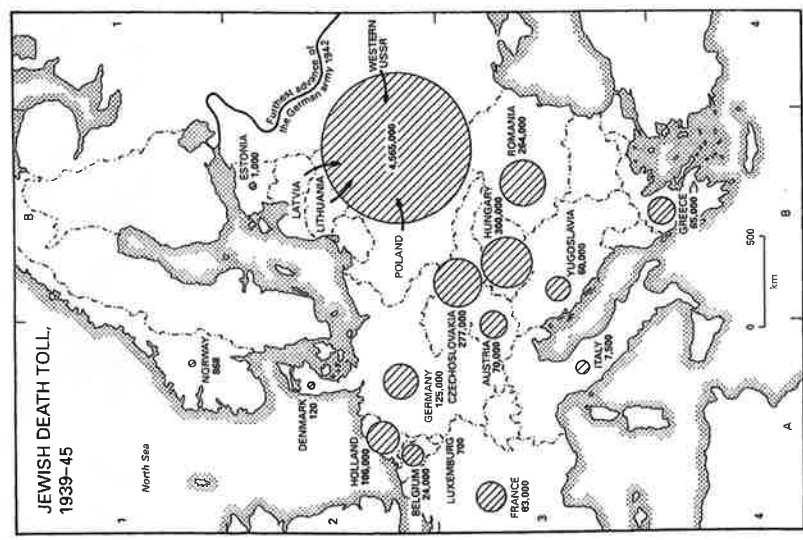
In their quest to carry out the Final Solution, SS doctors played a central role in the functioning of the camps. When deportees arrived after their long journeys it was the doctors who were instrumental in implementing the process of selection. In addition, such individuals carried out a ruthless and barbaric programme of medical experimentation in line with Nazi racial theory:

We arrived at night... Because you arrived at night, you saw miles of lights – and the fire from the crematoria. And then screaming and the whistles and the 'Out, out!', and the uniformed men and the SS with the dogs, and the stripped prisoners... They separated you and then lined up everybody in

fives... and there were two men standing... On one side, was the doctor, one was Mengele... and on the other side was the... *Arbeitsführer*, which was the... man in charge of the work *Kommando*. (Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors*, in UH, p. 188)

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Map 68 Jewish death toll, 1939-1945

DISCUSSION

1. Discuss life in the ghettos and concentration camps under Nazi rule.
2. In what ways did the Wannsee Conference determine the fate of European Jewry?

feels overwhelmed by the miseries of the world, but is at the same time convinced of the mercy and justice of the living God.

1

The Horrors of the Holocaust

Prelude to catastrophe

During the last days of the First World War, the assembly at Weimar drafted a new constitution which transformed Germany into a federal republic. Immediately this new regime faced opposition from the extreme right and left. During 1922-3 there was massive inflation, but during the next five years there was greater stability as well as important intellectual and cultural developments. This period of prosperity was followed by the Great Depression - over six million were unemployed between 1930 and 1933. As a consequence the communists and the Nazis gained considerable support. To cope with this crisis, the government began to rule by presidential decree. After several ineffective conservative coalitions, Field-Marshal Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933.

Hitler was born and raised in Austria. As a frustrated and unsuccessful artist he spent several years in Vienna and subsequently moved to Munich in 1913. Volunteering for the German army, he fought on the Western Front and returned to Munich in 1919 where he joined the National Socialist German Workers Party, later becoming its leader. Between 1919 and 1924 he combined German nationalism, anti-capitalism and anti-Semitism into a political ideology.

According to Hitler, the Jews were parasites and degenerates. Germany, he believed, lost the war because of treachery by Jewish socialists, liberals and pacifists. Further, he argued that the Bolshevik revolution was part of a world-wide Jewish plot. Such a fusion of anti-Jewish sentiment and anti-communism provided a justification for the belief that the Germans were entitled to greater

1

living space in Eastern Europe: the Jews had taken control over the Slavs and therefore the struggle against communism (defined as Jewish Bolshevism) was synonymous with the attack on Jewry itself. Hitler saw himself as the leader (*Führer*) of an heroic battle against a malignant part of Europe – an Aryan victory would provide Germany with control of an empire (*Reich*) which it rightly deserved.

During the 1920s Hitler's party was a minor force in Germany. In November 1923 the Nazis attempted a coup in Munich which failed. But the Depression gained Hitler the support of several sectors of society: German industrialists who feared communism; those who were insecure about their social positions; and boisterous youth. In 1928 the Nazis achieved 810,000 votes; in 1930 6,380,000; and 14,000,000 in 1932. On 5 March 1933 the Nazis won 44 per cent of the vote.

When the Nazis gained power, they dissolved a number of social institutions and absorbed others. In the spring and summer of 1933 all political parties were eliminated, strikes were outlawed, and trade unions were replaced by a government- and employer-controlled labour front. In May 1933 book burnings took place and scientists, scholars and artists were arrested. In June 1934 a purge of the SA (Stormtroops) eliminated the party's social radicals and made way for the expansion of the SS (Protection Squad). Under Heinrich Himmler, the SS troops took over many of the functions of the police, including the *Gestapo* (Secret Police), as well as the running of the concentration camps.

After Hindenburg's death in August 1934, Hitler became the party chief and head of state. In September 1935 all sexual liaisons between Jews and non-Jews were described as crimes against the state. In 1938 Jewish communal bodies were put under the control of the *Gestapo*, and Jews were forced to register their property. Later in the year the Nazi party organised an onslaught against the Jewish population. This event, known as *Kristallnacht*, "night of the broken glass", was a prelude to the terrors of the death camps.

Jews throughout Germany were victims of this massacre. In Hoengen, a small village near Aachen, the synagogue was destroyed. According to a witness who observed these events:

The stormtroops were joined by people who were not in uniform; and suddenly with one loud cry of, "Down with the Jews," the gathering outside produced axes and heavy sledges-

hammers. . . the little synagogue was but a heap of stone, broken glass and smashed up woodwork. . . Where the two well-cared-for flowerbeds had flanked both sides of the gravel path leading to the door of the synagogue, the children had lit a bonfire, and the parchment of the Scrolls gave enough food for the flames to eat up the smashed-up benches and doors, and the wood, which only the day before had been the Holy Ark for the Scrolls of the Law of Moses.

The first stage of the Nazis' plan for European Jewry began with the invasion of Poland in September 1939. In every conquered town and village the Germans forced Jews to clear rubble, carry heavy loads, hand over jewellery, and scrub floors and lavatories with their prayer shawls. In addition the Germans cut off religious Jews' beards and sidelocks with scissors or tore them from their faces. When the Jewish population was forced into what Hitler referred to as a huge Polish labour camp, a massive work programme was initiated. The nightmare of these camps was described by numerous eye-witnesses, such as this record of a mass slaughter of Jews at a camp in the village of Stutthof during the Passover of 1940.

All the Jews were assembled in the courtyard; they were ordered to run, to drop down and to stand up again. Anybody who was slow in obeying the order was beaten to death by the overseer with the butt of his rifle. Afterwards Jews were ordered to jump right into the cesspit of the latrines, which were being built; this was full of urine. The taller Jews got out again since the level reached their chin, but the shorter ones went down. The young ones tried to help the old folk, and as a punishment the overseers ordered the latter to beat the young. When they refused to obey, they were cruelly beaten themselves.

The surviving Jews from this camp were subsequently sent to another smaller camp at Gransdorf; only one survivor, a sculptor, was left behind. In the words of a witness to these events:

The SS men took all his works, put him to a carriage loaded with sand, and forced him to run while flogging him with a lash. When he fell down they turned the carriage over on him; and when he nevertheless succeeded in creeping out of the sand they poured water on him and hung him; but the rope was

too thin and gave way. They then brought a young Jewess, the only one in the camp, and with scornful laughter they hanged both on the rope.

The next stage in the plan of extermination began with the invasion of Russia in 1941. This was designed to destroy what was described by the Nazis as the "Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy". At first mobile killing battalions of 500-900 men (the *Einsatzgruppen*) under the supervision of Reinhard Heydrich began the slaughter of Russian Jewry. Of the 4,500,000 Jews who resided in Soviet territory, more than half fled before the German invasion; those who remained were concentrated in large cities making it easier for Heydrich's troops to carry out their task. Throughout the country the *Einsatzgruppen* moved into Russian towns, sought out the rabbi or Jewish council and obtained a list of all Jewish inhabitants. The Jews were then rounded up in market places, crowded into trains, buses and trucks and taken to woods where mass graves had been dug. They were then machine-gunned to death. A typical example of such killings was depicted by a civilian works engineer in the 1945 Nuremberg trials:

People were closely wedged together, lying on top of each other so that only their heads were visible. Nearly all had blood running over their shoulders from their heads. Some of the people shot were still moving. Some lifted their arms and turned their heads to show that they were still alive. The pit was already two-thirds full. I estimated that it held a thousand people.

In this slaughter the Jews attempted to escape the onslaught by hiding under floorboards and cellars, but they were buried alive or blasted out with grenades. A few girls offered themselves to stay alive; they were used during the night but killed the next morning. In the initial sweep between October and December 1941, these troops killed over 300,000 Jews; in a second stage that lasted throughout 1942 over 900,000 were murdered.

The death camps

Other methods were also employed by the Nazis. Mobile gas vans were sent to each battalion of the *Einsatzgruppen*. Meanwhile the mobile killing operations were being supplemented by the use of

fixed centres, the death camps. Six of these were at Chelmno and Auschwitz in the Polish territories, and at Treblinka, Sobibor, Majdanek and Belzec in the Polish "General Government". Construction of this mass murder industry began in 1941. Two civilians from Hamburg went to Auschwitz to teach the staff how to use Zyklon-B gas. In September 1941 the first gassing took place in Auschwitz Block II; then work began at Birkenau, the central killing centre in Auschwitz. The first death camp to be completed was Chelmno near Lodz which started functioning in December 1941. Subsequently Belzec became operational and the building of Sobibor began in March 1942. At the same time Majdanek and Treblinka were transformed into death centres.

The horrors of the rounding up of Jews and the journey and arrival at the camps have been depicted in numerous accounts. According to a Polish pharmacist who witnessed the Jews of Cracow being gathered together in the Cracow ghetto:

Old people, women and children pass by the pharmacy window like ghosts. I see an old woman of around seventy years, her hair loose, walking alone, a few steps away from a larger group of deportees. Her eyes have a glazed look; immobile, wide-open, filled with horror, they stare straight ahead. She walks slowly, quietly, only in her dress and slippers, without even a bundle, or handbag. She holds in her hands something small, something black, which she caresses fondly and keeps close to her old breast. It is a small puppy - her most precious possession, all that she saved and would not leave behind. Laughing, inarticulately gesturing with her hands, walks a young deranged girl of about fourteen, so familiar to all inhabitants of the ghetto. She walks barefoot, in a crumpled nightgown. One shuddered watching the girl laughing, having a good time. Old and young pass by, some dressed, some only in their underwear, hauled out of their beds and driven out.

Crowded together, Jews travelled to their deaths as the pace of murder accelerated. As a local Pole later recalled, the trains carrying these victims were horrifying:

The small windows were covered with planks or lots of barbed wire, and in some places planks were missing from the walls, which was proof of desperate struggles taking place inside.

Through the cracks in the planks and through the wired-up windows peered scared human faces. Sometimes we could tell that a train was approaching, although it was still far off, because of the shooting by the guards; they were standing on the buffers of the wagons and shooting those who tried to escape. When such a train stopped at Zwierzyniec station in order to allow another train to pass through, screams, laments and cries could be heard from all the wagons, "Water, water!" The Jews were holding out bottles and money fastened to sticks or broken parts of planks – but no-one was allowed to approach the wagons. The Germans were shooting without warning all those who begged for water, as well as those who tried to give it to them. Soldiers were marching along the train breaking the bottles with sticks and pocketing the money. Women were throwing rings, ear-rings and jewellery through the windows and cracks, begging for a glass of water for their children who were dying of thirst.

One of the survivors of a convoy of Jews who travelled from Paris to Auschwitz later recounted the terrors of this journey:

Piled up in freight cars, unable to bend or to budge, sticking one to another, breathless, crushed by one's neighbour's every move, this was already hell. During the day, a torrid heat, with a pestilential smell. After several days and several nights, the doors were opened. We arrived worn out, dehydrated, with many ills. A newborn baby, snatched from its mother's arms, was thrown against a column. The mother, crazed from pain, began to scream. The SS man struck her violently with the butt end of his weapon over the head. Her eyes haggard, with fearful screams, her beautiful hair became tinted with her own blood. She was struck down by a bullet in her head.

On arrival at the camps, Jews were ordered out of the train and separated into groups. According to a survivor of Treblinka, women and children were sent to the left, men to the right:

The women all went into the barracks on the left, and as we later learned, they were told at once to strip naked and were driven out of the barracks through another door. From there, they entered a narrow path lined on either side with barbed wire. This path led through a small grove to the building that housed

the gas-chamber. Only a few minutes later we could hear their terrible screams, but we could not see anything, because the trees of the grove blocked our view.

At Treblinka the women on arrival were shaved to the skin; their hair was later packed up for despatch to Germany. At the Nuremberg Tribunal one of those who survived gave an account of this procedure:

Because little children at their mothers' breasts were a great nuisance during the shaving procedure, later the system was modified and babies were taken from their mothers as soon as they got off the train. The children were taken to an enormous ditch; when a large number of them were gathered together they were killed by firearms and thrown into the fire.

Here, too, no one bothered to see whether all the children were really dead. Sometimes one could hear infants wailing in the fire. When mothers succeeded in keeping their babies with them and this fact interfered with the shaving, a German guard took the baby by its legs and smashed it against the wall of the barracks until only a bloody mass remained in his hands. The unfortunate mother had to take this mass with her to the "bath".

The most horrible of all horrors were the gas chambers. An eye witness to the killings at Belzec later recounted a typical occurrence:

A little before seven, there was an announcement: "The first train will arrive in ten minutes!" A few minutes later a train arrived from Lemberg: forty-five carriages with more than six thousand people; two hundred Ukrainians assigned to this work flung open the doors and drove the Jews out of the cars with leather whips. A loudspeaker gave instructions: "Strip, even artificial limbs and glasses. Hand all money and valuables in at the 'valuables' window. Women and girls are to have their hair cut in the 'barber's' hut." Then the march began. Barbed wire on both sides, in the rear two dozen Ukrainians with rifles.

Stark naked men, women, children and cripples passed by. . . SS men pushed the men into the chambers. . . Seven to eight hundred people in ninety-three square metres. The doors closed. . .

Twenty-five minutes passed. You could see through the window that many were already dead, for an electric light illuminated the interior of the room.

All were dead after thirty-two minutes. . . Jewish workers on the other side opened the wooden doors. They had been promised their lives in return for doing this horrible work, plus a small percentage of the money and valuables collected.

The people were still standing like columns of stone, with no room to fall or lean. Even in death you could tell the families, all holding hands. It was difficult to separate them while emptying the room for the next batch. The bodies were tossed out, blue, wet with sweat and urine, the legs smeared with excrement and menstrual blood. Two dozen workers were busy checking out mouths they opened with iron hooks. . . Dentists knocked out gold teeth, bridges and crowns with hammers.

Jewish resistance

By September 1942 German troops had conquered most of Europe. Yet as the murder of Jews continued, resistance spread. On 24 September the Jews of the White Russian town of Korzec set the ghetto on fire and a number of Jews established a partisan band. On 25 September in Kaluszyn near Warsaw, the chairman of the Jewish Council in Lukow near Lublin collected money from Jews assembled in the main square in the expectation that he could use the funds to ransom the Jewish community. When he discovered the deportation would take place, he shouted: "Here is your payment for our trip, you bloody tyrant." Tearing the money into shreds, he slapped the German supervisor in the face and was shot on the spot by the Ukrainian guards. In the same month a former Jewish soldier in the Polish army who was being held with several hundred other prisoners in a prison camp in Lublin escaped with seventeen Jews, forming a small partisan group.

In the Warsaw ghetto, the Jewish Fighting Organisation prepared itself for action. On 29 October a member of the Organisation killed the commander of the Jewish police in the ghetto. In the Bialystok ghetto resistance was also taking place with the assistance of German soldiers from whom they obtained weapons. Near Cracow six members of the Jewish Fighting Organisation set off for the forests armed with pistols and a knife, but were

betrayed by local peasants. The next month the Jewish Fighting Organisation in Cracow sabotaged railway lines, raided a German clothing store, and killed several Germans. In Marcinkance the chairman of the Jewish Council called out to the Jews who had been brought to the railway station: "Fellow Jews, everybody run for his life. Everything is lost!" As the Jews ran towards the ghetto fence, attacking the guards with their fists, over 100 were shot. Yet despite the insurmountable odds, some Jews in other situations did manage to escape from the Nazis. As one survivor recounted:

The moans of the elderly, the screams of the children. . . were being drowned by the clatter of the death train as it moved through the French countryside of contrasting bucolic beauty and serenity. . . We chose the moment of escape very carefully. It had to come at a time when the train would slow down for a curve. It also had to avoid the floodlights which the guards were aiming over the entire length of the concave curvature of the train during the period of reduced speed. . . At this split second, we had to take our chances and leap before the beams of the floodlights would fall on us. We jumped.

In November Polish Jews who had escaped the deportation to Treblinka organised a small group to protect those Jews who were in hiding. The news of executions in the labour camps in December stimulated plans for resistance in Warsaw. An eye witness wrote: "The community wants the enemy to pay dearly. They will attack them with knives, sticks, carbolic acid; they will not allow themselves to be seized in the streets, because now they know that labour camps these days mean death."

In the labour camp at Kruszyna near Radom Jews decided to resist with knives and fists in December. When they were ordered to assemble, they attacked the guards. Three weeks later 400 Jews imprisoned in the Kopernik camp in Minsk Mazowiecki barricaded themselves into the building and resisted with sticks, stones and bricks. On 22 December in Cracow the Jewish Fighting Organisation attacked a café frequented by the SS and the *Gestapo*. In Czestochowa on 4 January members of the Jewish Fighting Organisation wounded the German commander.

On 18 January 1943 the Germans entered the Warsaw ghetto determined to deport Jews to Treblinka. They did not expect any resistance, but preparations had been made in the ghetto for

Aryeh Wilner was the first to cry out: "Come, let us destroy ourselves. Let's not fall into their hands alive." The suicides began. . . Then someone discovered a hidden exit, but only a few succeeded in getting out this way. The others slowly suffocated in the gas.

Street by street the ghetto had been eliminated. In the fighting 7,000 Jews lost their lives, and 30,000 were deported to Treblinka.

The final stage of terror

Reports of resistance in Warsaw spread throughout Europe, but pressure against the Jews continued. The advance of the Red Army on the Eastern Front since early 1943 led to the decision to dig up the corpses of Jews and burn them. On 15 June at the Janowska death pits in Lvov hundreds of Jewish labourers were forced to dig up those who had been murdered and extract gold teeth and rings from the fingers of the dead. As a witness recounted:

The fire crackles and sizzles. Some of the bodies in the fire have had their hands extended. It looks as if they are pleading to be taken out. Many bodies are lying around with open mouths. Could they be trying to say: "We are your own mothers, fathers, who raised you and took care of you. Now you are burning us." If they could have spoken, maybe they would have said this, but they are forbidden to talk too - they are guarded. Maybe they would forgive us. They know that we are being forced to do this by the same murderers that killed them. We are under their whips and machine guns.

The pace of the killing was unchanging. On 4 October Himmler addressed his SS officers. The Jewish race was being eliminated, he explained:

Most of you know what it means when one hundred corpses are lying side by side, or five hundred, or one thousand. To have stuck it out and at the same time - apart from exceptional cases of human weakness - to have remained decent fellows, that is what has made us hard. This is a page of glory in our history which has never to be written. . . we had the moral right, we had the duty to world peace, to destroy this people which wished to destroy us.

months. Pistols and grenades were obtained; those who had no weapons armed themselves with sticks, bottles and lengths of pipe. As Jews were being deported along the street, a small group began to throw grenades at the Germans. In the words of one of those who observed these events:

The fighters set up a barricade in a little house on Niska street and held it against the German reinforcements which soon arrived. The Germans found it impossible to enter the house, so they set it afire. The fighters inside continued firing until the last bullet. . . though the unit was destroyed the battle on Niska street encouraged us. For the first time since the occupation we saw Germans clinging to the walls, crawling on the ground; running for cover, hesitating before making a step in the fear of being hit by a Jewish bullet. The cries of the wounded caused us joy, and increased our thirst for battle.

Several months later the Jews in Warsaw learned that the ghetto was to be destroyed. In response the Jewish community was determined to fight for its survival. The commander of the Jewish resistance group, Mordecai Anielewicz, declared: "He who has arms will fight. He who has no arms - women and children - will go down into the bunkers." As the Germans entered the Warsaw ghetto on 19 April, the Jews attacked. As one of the resistance fighters recounted:

All of a sudden they started entering the ghetto, thousands armed. . . And we, some twenty men and women, young. And what were our arms? The arms we had - we had a revolver, a grenade, and a whole group had two guns, and some bombs, home-made, prepared in a very primitive way. . . When the Germans came to our posts and marched by us we threw those hand grenades and bombs and saw blood pouring over the streets of Warsaw. . . There was rejoicing.

The next day German soldiers shelled buildings and burned apartment blocks. Yet the Jewish fighters continued their battle. By the end of the first week of May the last stage of Jewish resistance was a bunker in which 120 fighters were assembled. For two hours the entrance was bombarded and then the Germans used gas against the Jews. According to an observer:

men can experience only when they have fallen as low as we had fallen and then, through the mystic power of a deathless prayer, have awakened once more to the world of the spirit.

Other Jews in Dachau on this Day of Atonement also prayed. But the experiences these faced had shaken their faith in God:

We gather closer to the cantor, a young Hungarian lad. Lips murmur after him – quiet muffled words hardly manage to pass, remain sticking in the throat. Here stands Warsaw's last rabbi, his face yellow, hairless, wrinkled, his aged body bent; his hands are rocking like reeds in the wind; only the eyes, sparkling stars, look out towards the cold sky above, and his lips, half open, murmur softly.

What does he say now, how does he pray, this last of the rabbis of Warsaw? Does he lovingly accept the pain and suffering, or does he, through the medium of his prayer, conduct a dispute with the Almighty, asking Him the ancient question: "Is this the reward for faith?" Huddling to the cantor stands Alter der Klinger, the Kovno cab driver. His broad shoulders lean against a young tree and his mouth emits staccato sounds as if they were hummed out of his inside. No, he does not beg; he does not pray; he demands! He demands his rights, he calls for justice. Why were his children burnt by the Nazis? Why was his wife reduced to ashes?

God's Fury Poured Out: Bernard Maza

The religious dilemmas of the Holocaust

The events of the Holocaust have provoked a searching religious response from Orthodox Jewry. Some Orthodox scholars maintain that during the Holocaust God punished the Jewish people for neglecting His law. Other writers offer an alternative interpretation of the Nazi period in the light of the Orthodox tradition. In an important study *With Fury Poured Out*, the Orthodox theologian Bernard Maza has provided a Torah perspective on the death camps.

At the outset of the book Maza focuses on the central problem posed by the Holocaust by recounting a debate that took place on the eve of Yom Kippur during the Nazi period in the ghetto. When the cantor began to chant the blessing "Thou hast given us life", the silence was broken by wild screams. "Lies, lies, it's all lies!" one man shouted.

The congregants began to knock on wooden benches with their fists, demanding quiet. "Oy, Oy," they cried, "desecration and blasphemy!"

The person who had interrupted, however, paid no attention to their protests. This individual was Reb Chaim, a righteous and holy Jew. In the last slaughter all of his family had been taken away – by a miracle he remained alive.

Only one Jew dared to challenge his words. A young man, Leibel Brodsky, stepped forward; he was a *yeshiva* student who had strayed from the Torah's ways. He had become a desecrator of the Sabbath, a person who mocked the customs of Israel and

CHAPTER ONE

The Religious Challenge of the Holocaust

Richard Rubenstein: The Death of God

An American-born Conservative rabbi, Richard Rubenstein served as Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor of Religion at the University of Florida and as President of the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut. In After Auschwitz, he argues that it is no longer possible to sustain a belief in a supernatural Deity after the events of the Nazi era. Given God's seeming absence in the death camps, Jews should abandon the traditional belief in the Lord of history. In a later controversial work, Approaches to Auschwitz, Rubenstein explains the origin of his disbelief, and elaborates his conception of God as Divine Nothingness.

Rejecting God

(of paradox)

I believe the greatest single challenge to modern Judaism arises out of the question of God and the death camps. I am amazed at the silence of contemporary Jewish theologians on this most crucial and agonizing of all Jewish issues. How can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate, omnipotent actor in historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, anti-human explosion of all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept. I do not think that the full impact of Auschwitz has yet been felt in Jewish theology or Jewish life. Great religious revolutions have their own period of gestation. No man knows when the full impact of

Auschwitz can be felt, but no religious community can endure so hideous a wounding without undergoing vast inner disorders. (Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1966, 153)

The Death of God

No man can really say that God is dead. How can we know that? Nevertheless, I am compelled to say that we live in the time of the 'death of God.' This is more a statement about man and his culture than about God. The death of God is a cultural fact. Buber felt this. He spoke of the eclipse of God. I can understand his reluctance to use the more explicitly Christian terminology. I am compelled to utilize it because of my conviction that the time when Nietzsche's madman said 'God was too far off has come upon us. There is no way around Nietzsche. Had I lived in another time or another culture, I might have found some other vocabulary to express my meanings. I am, however, a religious existentialist after Nietzsche and after Auschwitz. When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God? (Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill, 1966, 151-152)

Nothingness and God

I believe there is a conception of God... which remains meaningful after the death of the God-who-acts-in-history. It is a very old conception of God with deep roots in both Western and Oriental mysticism. According to this conception, God is spoken of as the Holy Nothingness. When God is thus designated, he is conceived of as the ground and source of all existence. To speak of God as the Holy Nothingness is not to suggest that he is a void. On the contrary, he is an indivisible plenum so rich that all existence derives from his very essence. God as the Nothing is not absence of being but superfluity of being.

Why then use the term Nothingness? Use of the term rests in part upon a very ancient observation that all definition of finite entities involves negation. The infinite God is nothing. At times, mystics also spoke of God in similar terms as the *Ugrund*, the primary ground, the dark unnameable abyss out of which the empirical world has come.

At first glance, these ideas might seem little more than word play. Nevertheless, wise men of all the major religious traditions have expressed themselves in almost identical images when they have attempted to communicate the mystery of divinity. It is also helpful to note that whoever believes God is the source or ground of being usually believes that human personality is coterminous with the life of the human body. Death may be entrance into eternal life, the perfect life of God; death may also end pain, craving, and suffering, but it involves the dissolution and disappearance of individual identity...

Perhaps the best available metaphor for the conception of God as the Holy Nothingness is that God is the ocean and we are the waves. In some sense each wave has its moment in which it is distinguishable as a somewhat separate entity. Nevertheless, no wave is entirely distinct from the ocean which is its substantial ground.

(Richard Rubenstein, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, London, SCM, 1967, 315-316)

Discussion

1. Is it possible for Judaism to exist without a Deity?
2. Does Rubenstein's conception of God as the Holy Nothingness make sense?

Elie Wiesel: The Holocaust and Religious Protest

A Romanian Nobel Peace Prize winner and novelist, Elie Wiesel served as Chairman of the US Presidential Commission on the Holocaust and as Andrew Mellon Professor of Humanities at Boston University. In the novel *Night*, he portrays the evolution of his despair. In this work, he depicts his initial transition from youthful belief to disillusionment. At the beginning of the novel, Wiesel describes himself as a young boy fascinated with God's mystery, studying Talmud and Kabbalah in the Transylvanian town of Sighet. After being transported to Auschwitz, the erosion of his faith began. Shortly after his arrival he questioned God. Later, he ceased to pray.

Religious Doubt

One day when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Roll call. SS all round us, machine guns trained: the traditional ceremony. Three victims in

At different times, God uses different peoples as His whip against His own people, the Jews, but those whom He uses will be punished far worse than the people of the Lord. . . I know that God is punishing us because we have been the whip against Israel. In 1938 we smashed the synagogues; in 1945 our churches were smashed by the bombs. In 1938 we sent the Jews out to be homeless; since 1945 fifteen million Germans have experienced homelessness.

Grüber believed that Hitler's actions were immoral and that he would be punished. Though he did not explain why God punished the Jews, Rubenstein concluded that for Grüber it was because of their unwillingness to recognise Jesus as their Saviour. This was certainly the view of the German Ecumenical Church three years after the war – in 1948 at a meeting in Darmstadt the Church asserted that the Holocaust was a divine punishment visited upon the Jews, and they called upon the Jewish community to cease their rejection of Jesus Christ.

Though Rubenstein was shocked by Grüber's words, he recognised that there was nothing new in this attempt to understand history as the unfolding of God's plan. A parallel interpretation of Jewish history was held by the biblical prophets, the rabbis, and the Church Fathers. Nevertheless, Rubenstein had never before heard the argument applied to the events of the modern world. Yet, as he notes in *After Auschwitz*, there was no reason to reject its logic:

Given the Judeo-Christian conception, so strong in Scripture, that God is the ultimate actor in the historical drama, no other theological interpretation of the death of six million Jews is tenable. . . If one views all time and history through the perspective of the Christ, one would ultimately have to assert that God caused the Jews to be exterminated by the Nazis because of their continuing failure to confess and acknowledge the Christ. If one shared Rabbai Johanan ben Zakkai's view, one would be drawn to assert that the Jewish people had been exterminated because of their failure to comply with the Lord's commandments as these had been enjoined in the Torah.

When Rubenstein left Grüber's house, he was convinced that he could not avoid the issue of God's relation to the Holocaust. Though Grüber's view of God as involved in human history was

The Death of God: Richard Rubenstein

The eclipse of faith

In contrast to the theologians examined so far, the Jewish scholar and theologian Richard Rubenstein in *After Auschwitz* argues that it is impossible to sustain a belief in a supernatural deity after the events of the Nazi era. This conclusion was triggered by an encounter with a distinguished German clergyman, Heinrich Grüber, Dean of the Evangelical Church in East and West Berlin. In August 1961 Rubenstein had scheduled a research trip to West Germany. On 13 August the wall between East and West Berlin was erected which caused an international crisis. Rubenstein decided to postpone his visit until 15 August; when he arrived in Bonn, he was invited by the Press and Information Office of the Federal Republic to fly to Berlin. When he arrived he attended a mass rally addressed by the mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, and visited East Berlin. In this atmosphere Rubenstein interviewed Dean Grüber at his home in the West Berlin suburb of Dahlem.

During the Second World War Grüber helped baptise Jews and opposed the anti-Semitic programme of the Nazis. As a result, he was incarcerated in Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In 1961 he was the only German to testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann. In his conversation with Rubenstein, the Dean affirmed that God was active in history and was responsible for the Holocaust. Quoting Psalm 44.22, "For Thy sake are we slaughtered every day", Grüber explained that for some reason, it was part of God's plan that the Jews died. Comparing the terrible events of the Nazi regime with contemporary circumstances, he declared:

in harmony with Scripture, Rubenstein could not believe in such a divine being. It seemed amazing to him that Jewish theologians still subscribed to the belief in an omnipotent, beneficent God after the death camps. Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate actor in history – it interprets every tragedy as God's punishment for Israel's sinfulness. But Rubenstein was unable to see how this position could be maintained without viewing Hitler as an instrument of His will:

The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, anti-human exploitation of all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.

According to Rubenstein, a void now exists where once the Jewish people experienced God's presence. This demythologising of the Jewish tradition is, he argues, acknowledged in contemporary Jewish life even if it is not made explicit in Jewish theology. In the diaspora and in Israel the myth of an omnipotent God of history is effectively repudiated in the lives of most Jewish people. After the Nazi period, life is lived and enjoyed on its own terms without any superordinate values or special theological relationship.

Though Rubenstein rejects the image of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, he insists that it would be a mistake to construe his position as atheism. What he wishes to illustrate is that we live in the time of the death of God. He is compelled to use such terminology because it conveys the contemporary Jewish experience of God's absence. "When I say we live in the time of the death of God," he writes, "I mean that the thread uniting God and man, Heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any powerful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?"

Sacrificial death and the constraint of human evil

In his rejection of the traditional concept of God, Rubenstein mentions that though Jews have lost all hope and consolation related to a supernatural deity, they can still find spiritual vitality through traditional Jewish observances. This view is elaborated in Rubenstein's discussion of ancient sacrifice in *After Auschwitz*.

For Rubenstein the archaic elements of religion are often the most meaningful and should be retained as a source of regeneration – this is particularly the case with the sacrificial system of ancient Israel and its embodiment into the Jewish liturgy.

Rubenstein points out that there is currently considerable embarrassment about the sacrificial features of traditional worship. The Reform movement has exorcised all references to sacrifice; Conservative Jews remember the offering of sacrifice in the Jerusalem sanctuary but they omit the petitions for its retention. Yet Rubenstein believes that there are important reasons why the symbolic aspects of sacrifice should be retained as a central element in Jewish observance. Sacrifice has been one of the most universal religious activities in the history of humankind. In the Jewish faith, atonement was effected principally through the slaughter of animals in the Temple and the death of a scapegoat on Yom Kippur. Sacrifice symbolises moral failure, the acknowledgment of guilt, and the quest for forgiveness. It focuses the attention of the community on the fact that the people have assembled to share their failures and resolve to live better lives.

Nevertheless as an act of violence and death, sacrifice in the liturgy evokes a response of horror and revulsion on the part of many Jews today – those who wish to abolish it from the prayerbook recognise its bloody aspects. In ancient times a human being was originally the intended victim; only later were animals substituted as a surrogate. For many Jews this is a most distressing archaic and primitive dimension of biblical Judaism which is best forgotten. However, Rubenstein suggests that its symbolism is of vital significance in the modern world. With dramatic force which no conceptualisation can match, he writes, "The terrible lesson is borne on the community that it has only the choice of controlled regularised violence or irrational and uncontrolled violence."

Rubenstein argues that in a post-Holocaust age, the death of six million Jews should be understood in this context. The Jewish people were the sacrificial offering of the German nation. Ancient sacrifice limited the destructiveness of a people in times of stress, but without such a mechanism even the most civilised community can descend to murderous, unrestrained barbarism. This is precisely what occurred during the Nazi era. The Holocaust was an explosion of violence in which the German nation chose the Jews as a sacrificial victim for society's ills. By neglecting to recognise the nature of the human desire for destructiveness, an outpouring of evil was

unleashed upon millions of innocent victims.

Sacrifice in its institutionalised form thus serves as a channel for emotional catharsis. In this regard the dietary laws should be seen as rooted in the sacrificial aspects of Jewish religious existence. According to Rubenstein the system of *kashrut* (ritual food law) was an extension of Israel's sacrificial system – it was a response to the fact that eating is an act of contradiction and dilemma. Life continues only through the destruction and incorporation of another life. Judaism was responsive to this problem; by means of the dietary restrictions it sought to channel emotions and strivings which could become destructive without such limitation. Every meal was considered to return the blood of a slaughtered animal to the earth before the rest of the animal was consumed. Death and rebirth were thus united in this symbolic action, and in this way the Jewish tradition emphasised the pagan character of one of its most essential religious features.

Having experienced mass murder in this century, it is important for the Jewish community to recognise the value of the Jewish tradition which has managed to control the darker aspects of human aspirations. Further, Rubenstein maintains that with the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland, it was inevitable that there would be renewed interest in and contact with the archaic reverence for the primitive powers of earth. "We who have rediscovered the earth of Israel," he writes, "are not nearly so disturbed by the God of earth as were nineteenth-century reformers. Whereas their evolutionary mythology cast the primal and the archaic into disrepute and gave morality a specious respectability. . . we have acquired a renewed respect for the primal and archaic." Such regard for the primal aspects of the Jewish faith is of vital importance in the modern era. After the death camps, Jews have passed beyond illusion. Expecting nothing from man or God, they can apprehend the true nature of evil and the necessity of its containment. By perceiving the destructiveness in man's psyche, Jews have come face to face with their own nature and the reality of the human condition. Yet they can transcend despair by recognising that the sort of violence that was unleashed in the death camps can be harnessed and controlled by the archaic dimensions of their own faith.

The rebirth of Israel

During the Holocaust Jewry experienced the most degrading death

in the concentration camps. Yet this was not the last word – death in Europe was followed by the resurrection of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland. In the crisis of mass murder Jews discovered that they were totally and nakedly alone; nevertheless by their own efforts they have renewed Jewish existence in Zion. According to Rubenstein, one of the most important aspects of this quest is the extent to which it gives Jewish expression to the twentieth century's desire to return to primal origins. In philosophy Martin Heidegger has characterised his thought as an attempt to get behind thousands of years of philosophical estrangement from "being". In psychoanalysis there is the recognition of the importance of the subconscious, primitive impulses as well as crucial hidden events of the early life of mankind. Similarly Zionism has expressed a return to the pagan, the primitive and the earthly.

Rubenstein argues that this striving is decisively exhibited in Israeli folk music with its explosive use of percussion instruments and drums, its dionysian aspect, and its affirmation of the senses and sensuousness. "One has only to compare the best of the traditional liturgical music with the simplest of Israeli tunes," he writes, "to realise what a profound change has taken place. Perhaps there is no greater indication of the special difficulty of American Judaism and Jewish life than the knowledge that no middle-class American suburb could produce such music." Yet though this music could not have originated in an American milieu, it has the capacity to move American Jews who recognise its truth and reality. Such music communicates a sense of liberation and freedom promised by the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

Zionism's real significance lies in the fact that twenty centuries of self-distortion, self-estrangement and self-blame have ended – Jews are now free to live at every level of emotional and cultural experience. This renewal will inevitably influence all aspects of Jewish life. For those who believe that theology is of cardinal importance, Zionism will result in a resurgence of Jewish religious sentiment. In the deepest spiritual sense, Zionism is anti-historical. For two thousand years Jewish history has been a record of alienation. In ancient times the Jewish dispersion was seen as the result of sin – an end to Jewish guilt would bring in its wake an end to the negativities of Jewish existence. Zionism provided the means by which such a goal could be attained. In Messianic terms it proclaimed the end of history and a return to nature and its cyclical repetitiveness. As Rubenstein explains: "The end of history is characterised by the return to nature

and its vicissitudes rather than the abolition of nature's tragic and inevitable necessities. . . . Now nature's inevitabilities are seen as part of the tragic course of existence itself rather than as God's retaliation against human sinfulness."

Historical man - estranged from nature and dependent on a providential God - saw all suffering as the punishment exacted by an angry Master. Even nature was interpreted as an expression of the divine will. Thus earthly joys disappeared along with its sorrows; only supernatural terror and guilt were real. As a consequence, unnecessary fears, anxieties and estrangements became commonplace. For Rubenstein, such a dehumanisation of man's spirit is the final stage in historical man's estrangement. The Jewish people, however, have transcended their previous historical mentality through the creation of a Jewish state and a return to the land. The attainment of this goal, Rubenstein believes, will inevitably result in the cessation of the traditional longing for a future redemption. Instead Jews in Israel will lead a full life in their own country. In this regard Zionism does not anticipate an end to life's insecurities; it calls for an end to the interpretation of insecurity as guilt. Israeli Jews will come to perceive that they have no need of distant utopias. This is a transition of world-historical importance - it is the turning of the people of the religion of history to the religion of nature in keeping with the twentieth century's return to primal origins.

Israel's return to the earth elicits a reversion to the archaic earth-religion of Israel. This does not imply that Jews will worship Baal and Astarte, but rather that earth's fruitfulness, vicissitudes and engendering power will become the central spiritual realities of Jewish life in Israel. In the religion of history nature is subordinated to man's desires, but in the religion of nature human beings are at home with the earth and its divinities. Nature and man are one - fertility, fecundity and joy are nature's piety. Rubenstein points out in this regard that the return to Israel has been characterised by a break with bourgeois Jewish existence. The growth of the kibbutz, the compulsory military service of women, and the need for labourers in Israel constitute a decisive shift away from middle-class forms of Jewish existence. It is now possible for Jews to experience a wide range of possibilities for living vitally and creatively in modern society.

With the end of man's estrangement from nature, a new understanding of God's relation to the world is needed. No longer

will God be conceived as the transcendental Lord of nature. In the return to the land of Israel, Jews will become aware of the fact that they are alive and are the expression of the powers and divinities of earth. Human beings at home with themselves are able to see the cosmos as animated by the same life which infuses their own being. This is why the ancients depicted their gods as suffering, mating, dying and being resurrected. Rubenstein emphasises that this return to nature does not mean a return to polytheism; rather God will be understood as participating in nature's vicissitudes and necessities. This new perception highlights the dark side of divinity. Traditionally darkness was seen as inherent in man's nature, but Rubenstein writes: "To say that God and nature are at one with each other, that they are alive and life-engendering, is to affirm the demonic side not alone in us but in divinity as well."

Return to mystical religion

In *Approaches to Auschwitz*, his most recent study of the Holocaust written with the Christian theologian John Roth, Rubenstein explains that his theological view today is akin to mystical religion - he no longer regards the universe as cold and unfeeling. His earlier views in *After Auschwitz* should be seen as the response of an assimilated Jew to the Jewish tradition after the extermination of millions of Jews. His position then was understandably bleak; yet today he would balance the elements of destruction and love in the cosmos more evenly with those of destruction and hate than he was prepared to do in 1966. Rubenstein's initial response to Auschwitz was that the demise of Judaism's theological validation did not entail an end to the psychological or sociological functions of the tradition. He was aware that many Jews had experienced their own loss of faith but remained Jews nevertheless. Religion, he argued, is more than a system of belief; it comprises shared rituals, customs and folk memories. He thus conceived that religion is not so much dependent on belief as upon practices related to the life-cycle events. "I have suggested," he writes in *After Auschwitz*, "that Judaism is the way in which we share the decisive times and crises of life through the traditions of our inherited community. The need for that sharing is not diminished in the time of the death of God."

In rejecting the biblical and rabbinic understanding of God, he expressed his belief in the immanence rather than the transcendence of God. According to this view, the cosmos is the expression of a

single unifying source. Moreover, if human beings are seen as an integral part of the universe – which is an expression of this divine ground – then deity is capable of thought, reflection and feeling at least in its human manifestation. This view of God, found in both the pre-biblical world and religious mysticism, served as the basis for Rubenstein's conception of divinity, understanding of nature, paganism, and perception of the Jewish people's return to their ancestral homeland. According to Rubenstein, after the Holocaust and the return to Israel, the God manifested in and through nature was the God to whom Jews would turn instead of the God of Jewish history. For this reason Rubenstein advocated a modified form of Canaanite nature paganism in place of the worship of the biblical God of Scripture. As the years passed, however, his earlier paganism which was linked to the land of Israel receded in importance as Israel became less central to his own thinking. Previously he thought that when the Jewish people were at home in Israel, they would turn to the worship of the nature gods of the land. But he came to see that the majority of the world's Jews did not regard Israel as their home; even those who lived in Israel perceived the insecurity of their position in relation to the Arab threat. Most Jews simply did not wish to emigrate. Thus the goal of Jewish history had not been attained, and he realised that despite the challenge of the death camps most religious Jews would continue to believe in the biblical concept of God. Furthermore, it became evident that those who lived in Israel had little interest in the nature paganism he previously endorsed.

These facts led Rubenstein to re-evaluate his earlier position. As he came into contact with the civilisations and religions of Asia, he has espoused a mystical theology similar to the mysticism found in Buddhism and Hegelian thought. In mysticism Rubenstein found a God whom he could affirm after the Holocaust – this view has replaced his earlier emphasis on the coldness and silence of the cosmos. This notion of God, he insists, is meaningful after the death of the God-who-acts-in-history. It is an ancient conception with deep roots in Western and Oriental mysticism. According to this view, God is the Holy Nothingness. As such He is the ground and source of everything. He is not a void; rather such a God is an individual plenum, so rich that all existence is derived from His very essence. He is superfluity of being rather than absence of being.

Rubenstein's use of the term "Nothingness" rests in part upon the ancient observation that all definitions of finite entities involve negation. The infinite God cannot be defined – He is in no sense a

thing bearing any resemblance to finite beings. Mystics have also spoken of God as the primary ground, the dark unnameable abyss out of which the empirical world emerged. In all the major world religions, sages have attempted to communicate the divine mystery by the use of similar images. "Perhaps the best available metaphor for the concept of God as the Holy Nothingness," Rubenstein writes, "is that God is the ocean and we are the waves. In some sense each wave has its moment in which it is distinguishable as a somewhat separate entity. Nevertheless, no wave is entirely distinct from the ocean which is the substantial ground." In mysticism then Rubenstein has found the God whom he can affirm after Auschwitz, even though such a conception is far removed from the biblical and rabbinic view of a transcendental God who created and sustains the universe and providentially watches over His chosen people.

Critique

A central problem with Rubenstein's view of the Holocaust is that he has taken the extreme position of denying God's existence. For Rubenstein, modern man lives in the time of the death of God – there is now a void where once God was present. This challenge to religious belief is of vital importance. In *After Auschwitz* and later writings Rubenstein has articulated the lack of belief felt by many Jews in a post-Holocaust world. Yet such a standpoint offers no hope for those Jews who are struggling to make sense of the Nazi period in religious terms. For these individuals the Holocaust is not a decisive refutation of the biblical and rabbinic conception of God as the providential Lord of history; rather the events of the Second World War constitute a stimulus for theological reflection and soul-searching.

For these Jews God is understood as outside time. He is the power beyond the universe in its entirety. As creator of all things, He is greater than any of its parts. The world is limited in duration, but God is infinite and eternal. There is nothing God cannot do, and in His omniscience He is aware of everything that takes place in the universe including the human heart. In addition God is active in history. Not only is He the source of all, He also chose the Jews from all peoples, guides their destiny and providentially directs all history to its final consummation. As holy, righteous and merciful Lord, He is a loving Father to all who call upon Him. This view of God – enshrined in the Jewish tradition – has animated the faithful

from earliest times to the present day. By denying such a conviction which is at the heart of Jewish belief and practice, Rubenstein has failed to provide a viable theodicy for those who wish to remain loyal to the faith of Israel.

A further difficulty with Rubenstein's view concerns his espousal of sacrifice as a channel for containing the dark side of human motivation. This cathartic action, he asserts, is a relevant response to the covert and unconscious dimension of human intention. Through sacrifice Judaism sought to limit and contain strivings which could otherwise become hopelessly destructive. Unlike religions which stress rational decision-making, ancient Judaism was realistic about man's moral failure, guilt and potential for violence. For this reason Rubenstein admonished modern Jews to retain the vestiges of the sacrificial system in the liturgy. Yet arguably the preservation of mere words about the sacrificial without the actual deed is an insufficient vehicle for channelling the demonic side of human nature.

Given Rubenstein's analysis of the efficacy of sacrifice, the absence of the actual slaughter of animals robs the sacrificial service of its emotional force. In ancient Israel animals were killed and burnt on the altar – the sight of blood and the smell of incense intermingled as the psalms were chanted to the sound of music. On the New Year a goat was thrown from a cliff into the sea as a symbol of casting away sins. These actions – involving the violent killing of animals as acts of thanksgiving and atonement – are archaic and primal features of the Jewish past. Rubenstein celebrates them as fundamental features of the Jewish heritage. Yet he cannot see his way to advocating that these practices be reintroduced into contemporary Judaism. In this he is inconsistent. If sacrifice is of such vital psychological significance for modern man, these dramatic and highly charged acts need to be reinstituted into contemporary Jewish life; the liturgical inheritance simply does not possess sufficient emotional impact. No doubt the Jewish community would reject such a suggestion, but it is unfortunate that Rubenstein does not follow his argument to its logical conclusion.

Rubenstein's espousal of nature paganism is equally problematic. Jewry, he believes, must now turn from the worship of the God of history to the celebration of nature and its potentialities. Such a break with the past is a process of self-liberation through the rediscovery of the primal aspects of ancient Judaism. This transformation of Jewish life, he argues, is most clearly manifest in the Zionist quest, the rebuilding of the Jewish state, and the return to the land. Rubenstein

insists, however, that the preoccupation with nature does not mean that the worship of Baal and Astarte will supplant the worship of God. Yet if this is not to be the case, what is the content of such modern paganism? Surely a return to archaic earth-religion must entail the worship of the divinities of the earth. Moreover, Rubenstein appears to have misconstrued the nature of contemporary Zionism. Though the founding of the state of Israel has brought about a liberation from previous patterns of Jewish existence, it has not led to the reintroduction of any kind of pagan practices into Jewish life in Israel or the diaspora.

There is a further difficulty related to Rubenstein's defense of religious mysticism. In *After Auschwitz* he repeatedly identifies his earlier criticism of traditional theism as death of God theology. Modern Jewry, he insists, lives in an age when it is no longer possible to believe in an all-good and omnipotent God who rules over history. At numerous points he asserts that since God did not intervene to stop evil in the death camps, the traditional Jewish view of God simply cannot be true. Nevertheless Rubenstein is anxious to deny any charge of atheism and Jewish inauthenticity. In *Approaches to Auschwitz* he subscribes to a belief in the Holy Nothingness, a concept paralleled in Western and Oriental mysticism. According to this view, the divine is the ground of everything, a transcendental source of the universe to which all things will return. As an indefinable, infinite mystery, He is the God whom Rubenstein is able to affirm in a post-Holocaust world. It is clear, however, that such a notion of divinity is far removed from the Jewish understanding of God. Even within Jewish mysticism where God is conceived as the *Ayn Sof* (the indefinable source of the cosmos), the traditional view of God is assumed. Though Rubenstein's vision of the divine may have affinities with Buddhism and Hegelianism, it is a mistake to consider it a viable theological option within Judaism. Indeed such an understanding of God would in all likelihood fail to evoke the religious response which Rubenstein extols. Throughout *After Auschwitz* he contends that many traditional practices in Judaism such as *bar mitzvah* and *kashrut* have spiritual significance in contemporary society – such observances possess existential, social and psychological meaning and value. But it is questionable whether Jews would continue such forms of Jewish life if their content were radically altered. If Jews cease to believe in God as creator, sustainer, and saviour, it is unlikely that they will feel compelled to carry out those practices which are intended to glorify Him.

happening today. The times are too turbulent to use arguments in the discussion. Let us hope that a more tranquil time will come and that a movement which considers it a matter of pride to be recognized as the peacemaker of the national uprising will no longer derive pleasure from degrading others, even though it might feel that it must fight them. As for us Jews, we can defend our honour.

(Robert Welsch, 'Wear the Yellow Badge with Pride' in Albert Friedlander (ed.), *Out of the Whirlwind*, New York, Schocken, 1976, 121-123)

Discussion

1. Are Jews inevitably victims of anti-Semitism?
2. Should German Jews have heeded the Zionists' call to emigrate to Palestine?

Leban

Emil Fackenheim: The Holocaust and the Commanding Voice

Born in Germany, Emil Fackenheim was ordained a Reform rabbi and served as Professor at the University of Toronto. In various works, he has argued that God was present in the death camps. Out of the ashes of Auschwitz, he issued the 614th commandment.

The 614th Commandment

What does the Voice of Auschwitz command:

Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish.

(Emil Fackenheim, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust' in Michael Morgan (ed.), *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1987, 176)

Modern Jewry

I think the authentic Jew of today is beginning to hear the 614th commandment. And he hears it whether, as agnostic, he hears no more, or whether, as believer, he hears the voice of the *mitzvah* (the commander) in the *mitzvah* (the commandment). Moreover, it may well be the case that the authentic Jewish agnostic and the authentic Jewish believer are closer today than at any previous time.

To be sure the agnostic hears no more than the *mitzvah*. Yet if he is Jewishly authentic, he cannot but face the fragmentariness of his hearing. He cannot, like agnostics and atheists all around him, regard this *mitzvah* as the product of self-sufficient human reason, realizing itself in an ever-advancing history of autonomous human enlightenment. The 614th commandment must be, to him, an abrupt and absolute given revealed in the midst of total catastrophe.

On the other hand, the believer, who bears the voice of the *mitzvah*, in the *mitzvah*, can hardly hear anything more than the *mitzvah*. The reasons that made Martin Buber speak of an eclipse of God are still compelling. And if, nevertheless, a bond between Israel and the God of Israel can be experienced in the abyss, this can hardly be more than the *mitzvah* itself.

The implications of even so slender a bond are momentous. If the 614th commandment is binding upon the authentic Jew, then we are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or believe in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as a place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories.

How can we possibly obey these imperatives? To do so requires the endurance of intolerable contradictions. Such endurance cannot but bespeak an as yet untenable faith. If we are capable of this endurance, then the faith implicit in it may well be of historic consequence. At least twice before—at the time of the destruction of the First and Second Temples—Jewish endurance in the midst of catastrophe helped transform the world. We cannot know the future, if only because the

present is without precedent. But this ignorance on our part can have no effect on our present action.

(Emil Fackenheim, 'The Jewish Return into History' in Michael Morgan (ed.), *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987, 159-160)

Religious Duty

The ultimate question is: where was God at Auschwitz? For years I sought refuge in Buber's image of an eclipse of God. This image, still meaningful in other respects, no longer seems to me applicable to Auschwitz. Most assuredly no redeeming voice is heard from Auschwitz, nor ever will be heard. However, a commanding Voice is being heard, and has, however faintly, been heard from the start. Religious Jews hear it, and they identify its source. Secularist Jews also hear it, even though perforce they leave it unidentified. At Auschwitz, Jews came face to face with absolute evil. They were and still are singled out by it, but in the midst of it they hear an absolute commandment: Jews are forbidden to grant posthumous victories to Hitler. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. A secularist Jew cannot make himself believe by a mere act of will, nor can he be commanded to do so; yet he can perform the commandment of Auschwitz. And a religious Jew who has stayed with his God may be forced into new, possibly revolutionary, relationships with him. One possibility, however, is wholly unthinkable. A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.

(Emil Fackenheim, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust' in Michael Morgan (ed.), *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987, 165)

Discussion

1. Is it plausible that a 614th commandment was issued out of the death camps?
2. Did Jews face absolute evil during the Nazi era?

Lionel Rubino: The Holocaust and God's Presence

Lionel Rubino served as Professor in the Philosophy Department of Trent University in Canada. In 'Auschwitz and the Theology of the Holocaust', he proposes an authentic Jewish response to the Holocaust based on the theology of Emil Fackenheim. According to Rubino, Jews must remain loyal to the tradition so as to ensure the survival of the Jewish nation.

Responding to Auschwitz

How can a Jew respond Jewishly to an event like Auschwitz? This response, according to Fackenheim, takes the form not only of memory but of witness. Not to remember would be blasphemy. Not to be a witness would be a betrayal. For a Jew, to respond through memory and witness is to commit himself to survival as a Jew. To dedicate oneself as a Jew to survival in the age of Auschwitz is in itself a monumental act of faith. To be a Jew after Auschwitz is to confront the demons of Auschwitz and to bear witness against them in all their guises. It is to assert as the basis of one's beliefs the conviction that evil will not prevail and to stake one's life and those of one's children on this conviction. Indeed, as Fackenheim represents it, Auschwitz reexperienced is nothing short of revelation. Through that revelation of reliving Auschwitz the Jew is commanded to survive as a Jew through memory and witness in order that Hitler may not be permitted a posthumous victory. Jews are forbidden to despair of God and of the world as the domain of God lest the world be handed over to the forces of Auschwitz. For a Jew to break this commandment would be to do the unthinkable—to respond to Hitler by doing his work.

(Lionel Rubino, 'Auschwitz and the Theology of the Holocaust' in Paul D. Opahl and Marc H. Tanenbaum (eds), *Speaking of God Today*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974, 122-123)

Divine Command

The greatest challenge to midrashic thought is the Holocaust whose symbol is Auschwitz. It is difficult enough to comprehend the possibility of a midrashic encounter with the ordinary history of evil. It is utterly incomprehensible how there could be immediacy after reflection on Auschwitz: incomprehensible that is, unless we are to

Jewish community is God's suffering servant. The state of Israel negates this hypothesis – Israeli Jews reject their former condition of powerlessness in the face of oppression. For Maybaum, diaspora Jewry represents the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan – Jewish emancipation was the divinely ordained result of the Holocaust. Through such liberation from medievalism, he believes, Jews are able to be a light to the nations. It is thus diaspora Jewry rather than the state of Israel which is able to bring about the building of God's kingdom on earth. For most Jews such a vision has little significance. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Jews in all lands have looked to Israel as their salvation in a hostile world. For Jewry worldwide the Holocaust and the subsequent establishment of a Jewish state are organically related events, not as the unfolding of God's plan but as a sign of hope for the future.

Maybaum's presentation of the Holocaust as the third *churban* in God's plan for the redemption of mankind is therefore flawed in several respects. Like Maza, Maybaum attempts to explain Jewish suffering and death by utilising concepts from the Bible. Both writers have insisted that God was present in the death camps. Yet Maybaum's presentation affirms God's omnipotence at the cost of divine love, for though two-thirds of the Jewish people survived, six million innocent victims died in the most horrific fashion. And the advent of the modern world, which Maybaum so enthusiastically welcomes, is itself full of dangers for the Jewish people and for humanity as well. Thus Maybaum's interpretation of divine theodicy fails to provide an adequate answer to the question why an all-powerful and all-good God could have allowed His chosen people to perish at the hands of the Nazis.

Revelation and Mass Murder: Emil Fackenheim

The challenge of the Holocaust

Like Ignaz Maybaum, the Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil Fackenheim offers a positive theological response to the Holocaust in a wide range of writings. In his early work he did not directly address the problem of this event. But in his later writings he recognised that the Holocaust raises the most central religious issues for modern Jewry. The turning point in his own thinking began when he discovered that Jews were committed to Jewish survival in the face of the tragedy of the death camps. "Not until I found this scandal (of Auschwitz)," he wrote, "did I make what to me was, and still is, a momentous discovery. Jews throughout the world – rich and poor, learned and ignorant, believer and unbeliever – were already responding to Auschwitz, and in some measure had been doing so all along. Faced with the radical threat of extinction, they were stubbornly defying it, committing themselves, if to nothing more, to the survival of themselves and their children as Jews."

In discussing the Holocaust, Fackenheim distinguishes between the attempt to account for this occurrence and the desire to make a genuine religious response. The first quest, he believes, is blasphemous. Those who seek to explain the horrors of the Nazi period believe they can categorise these events in various theological frameworks such as sin and punishment. For Fackenheim, however, these solutions do not take into account their full terror. What is required instead is a sensitive awareness of the enormity of this catastrophe. Rather than trying to elucidate the Holocaust, Fackenheim has searched for an authentic response. There are several reasons why this was necessary. First, the Holocaust had already

evoked an intense reaction from the Jewish community. In the wake of the Nazi period a long theological silence was necessary, but Fackenheim believes this period has now passed. Given this situation, he feels obliged to give guidance to the community and he also contends that it is a sacred obligation to remember all those who were murdered. Further, he argues that Jews must connect God with modern history.

According to Fackenheim, the Holocaust was a unique event. Even the term "genocide" does not capture the most important aspects of this calamity. There are two central factors, he argues, which distinguish this event from other occurrences. First, six million Jews were murdered not because of their religious beliefs, but because their grandparents continued to see themselves within the Jewish covenant. And second, the process of killing was seen as an end in itself; unlike previous massacres, Jews did not face death in order to bear witness to their faith. The uniqueness of the Holocaust is thus of central importance to Fackenheim because of the way in which the Nazis defined Jewishness in order to rid Europe of Jewry. Killing Jews became a goal in itself, and such an intention is an example of what Fackenheim calls "radical evil". This is what differentiates the Holocaust from all other acts of genocide in which there was a rational goal. Even though modern Jews might wish to divorce the Holocaust from previous Jewish history, this is impossible – it serves as a terrifying reminder that the Jew cannot escape his own identity.

Given the magnitude of this tragedy, Fackenheim questions whether the challenge of the Holocaust is similar to what Jews have faced in other times of great suffering. He asks whether, for example, it is comparable to the destruction of the first and second Temple or the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. If so, the Holocaust was essentially an "epoch-making event", an occurrence which brings faith into conflict with experience. Epoch-making events, he believes, endanger the continuity of Judaism since they test the ability of the community to accommodate Jewish suffering into a divine providential scheme. Such challenges call into question God's power over human history. If the Holocaust is similar to such tragedies, it has the capacity to undermine Judaism. As Fackenheim explains: "At Auschwitz Jews were murdered, not because they had disobeyed the God of history, but rather because their great-grandparents had obeyed Him. . . . Never, within or without Jewish history, have men anywhere had such a dreadful

such a horrifying reason for turning their backs on the God of history."

Though Fackenheim believes the Holocaust was an event of this order, he thinks it is also a "root experience". The manifestations of God's saving presence at the Red Sea and His commanding presence at Sinai are previous examples of such experiences – they serve as the foundation of the belief in God's omnipotence and providential concern for His chosen people. The distinctive features of such root experiences are, firstly, God's presence is immediately given in the event for the abiding astonishment of the witnesses; secondly, the event is public and historical; thirdly, the event is accessible to later generations. Root experiences continually transform Jewish consciousness and experience since they demonstrate that God acts in history. Later generations are able to re-enact the original event and thereby respond to God's continuing presence.

For Fackenheim the Holocaust fulfils these conditions. The Holocaust was a public and historical event, clearly accessible to Jews of later generations. In addition, God's presence was manifest in the death camps just as He revealed Himself in ancient times. Thus Fackenheim writes that for the religious Jew who remains within the traditional midrashic framework, the Voice of Auschwitz manifests a divine presence when, as it were, it is shorn of all except the commanding power. This power, however, is inescapable.

The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz

Fackenheim believes that just as the root experience of God's presence at Mount Sinai resulted in a series of divine commands, so in the death camps God revealed a further commandment to His chosen people. This 614th commandment – added to the 613 commandments contained in the Torah – is directed to the post-Holocaust Jewish community. In *God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*, he gives a full explanation of this decree:

Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they co-operate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of

Israel, lest Judaism perish. . . A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself co-operating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.

According to Fackenheim, it is a sacred duty to remember the Holocaust. The intention of the Nazis was to eliminate all Jews – no survivor was to be left to tell the story of the horrors that took place. They were making as sure as possible that every trace of memory was wiped out. Millions would be as though they had never been. The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz demands that those who perished must never be forgotten. It is a holy duty to remember and tell the tale – such an obligation is not negotiable. For Fackenheim, the murderers of Auschwitz dehumanised their victims and denied them the right to exist. Jews after Auschwitz represent humanity when they affirm their Jewish identity, but it is not enough to affirm humanity-in-general. In the death camps God decreed that Jews as members of the Jewish people must continue to survive. This is a sacred commitment which was heard by the Jews of Israel in May and June 1967 when they refused to lie down and be slaughtered. Despite the fact that overt anti-Semitism is not popular in a post-Holocaust world, Jews are not automatically granted the right to ensure their own survival. Other states are censured if they wage wars of aggression, but Israel is seen as an aggressor even when it fights for its own life. The Jewish survivors of Auschwitz are seen as having no right to exist unless they engage in protests against contemporary evil which resembles what occurred in the camps. But the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz demands that Jews reject such views. Further, Jewry is commanded to abandon the time-honoured Jewish exaltation of martyrdom. After Auschwitz Jewish life is more sacred than Jewish death. In the light of the death camps there is only one supreme value: existence.

Fackenheim insists that the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz also bids the Jews not to abandon the world to the forces of darkness. Instead they must continue to work for a more humane society. They must not despair of the world because of the events of the Nazi period; nor should they abandon the age-old identification with the poor and the persecuted. It is because of the uniqueness of Auschwitz and their role as Jews that they must identify with all humanity.

Moreover, the Voice of Auschwitz commands that religious Jews wrestle with God in revolutionary ways. The stance of the pious

Jew must be one of protest. Hearing both the Voice of Sinai and the Voice of Auschwitz, they will no doubt feel compelled to adopt extreme positions. In confronting God, such a stance would result in taking issue with God. It would not be unusual, for example, for them to exclaim: "You have abandoned the covenant? We shall not abandon it! You no longer want Jews to survive? We shall survive, as better, more faithful Jews! You have destroyed all grounds for hope? We shall obey the commandment to hope which you yourself have given!" As far as the secular Jew is concerned, he too must not forsake the Jewish tradition. The Voice of Auschwitz demands Jewish unity. Religious and secularist Jews are in this way united in kinship with the victims of the Holocaust.

Regarding the interpretation of Auschwitz, Fackenheim believes that God's presence is a mystery which will never be explained – all attempts to provide a theological explanation are doomed to failure. But this is not the case as far as Nazi involvement is concerned. There is no mystery about mass murder. Those who participated in this tragedy murdered the God of Israel six million times and destroyed four thousand years of Jewish faith. A Jew after Auschwitz is commanded not to side with these killers to accomplish what they left undone. As he explains, "The rabbis assert that the first Temple was destroyed because of idolatry. Jews may not destroy the Temple which is the tears of Auschwitz by doing, wittingly, or unwittingly, Hitler's work."

The Voice of Auschwitz thus calls all Jews to remain faithful to their heritage. Martyrdom is ruled out by the duty to Jewish survival. Otherworldly mysticism is also not an option for Jews since the Jewish community must work to build a better world. Jewry today is obliged to retrace the road which led others to the death camps. This task involves remembering the horrors of the past and yet opting and working for humanity. This is a perilous quest, full of conflict. But the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz demands that Jews accept their condition, face up to its contradictions, and struggle for Jewish survival. The Jew of today can endure, he writes, because he must endure and he must endure because he is commanded to endure.

Mending the world

In *To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought* Fackenheim argues that faith and philosophical thought are not immune

from the Holocaust. This catastrophic event has created a rupture in history. The Holocaust brought about a crisis of such magnitude that the institutions of society proved impotent in confronting it. Not only did these institutions fail to respond to this disaster but they have subsequently retreated to escapism – the events of the Nazi period are seen simply as unfortunate occurrences of the modern world. But for Fackenheim the rupture cannot be mended unless the significance of these tragic occurrences is understood.

Fackenheim has directed considerable attention to the question of how such restoration can take place. To explain this process he has utilised the concept of *tikkun* (repair) drawn from the Jewish mystical tradition. Such reconstruction, he believes, cannot take place solely in the realm of thought. The rupture took place in history, and therefore it is in this sphere that repair is necessary. What is required is to resist the Nazi "logic of destruction".

This phenomenon was totally different from all previous attempts to eliminate a people. The National Socialists viewed the Jewish nation as vermin and bacilli rather than human beings and thus they were determined to destroy Jews wherever they were found. To do so they utilised technical intelligence, planning and rationality to create the death camps. This process was an assault on Jews as people. The Nazis, for example, restricted the time and place for prisoners in the camps to eliminate their excrement. Toilet facilities were pitifully inadequate – in one section at Auschwitz there was only one latrine. In addition, the soup made many prisoners ill with diarrhoea and dysentery. Such excremental assaults filled the victims with deep self-contempt; many lost the will to live. As a result prisoners were transformed into Muselmänner – people who are dead while alive.

Citing Primo Levi's depiction, Fackenheim explains:

On their entry into the camp, through basic incapacity, or by misfortune, or through some banal incident, they are overcome before they can adapt themselves; they are beaten by time, they do not begin to learn German, to disentangle the infernal knot of laws and prohibitions until their body is already in decay, and nothing can save them from selection or from death by exhaustion. . . . the Muselmänner, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an anonymous mass, continuously renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty really to

suffer. One hesitates to call them living; one hesitates to call their death death.

According to Fackenheim, the Nazi regime was intent on making individuals Muselmänner before they actually died. Yet despite this plan, some inmates did resist. For Fackenheim such acts of resistance constitute the religious response to Auschwitz and the beginning of *tikkun* (repair). Fackenheim points out that rebellion in the camps took many forms: some victims consciously prevented themselves from becoming Muselmänner; pregnant women refused to abort their pregnancies so that their children could survive; Jewish partisans took to the woods to fight the Nazis; Hasidic Jews prayed when forbidden to do so. Although such gestures were infrequent, they demonstrate that there were some prisoners who resisted against hopeless odds – their heroism shows that the logic of destruction can be thwarted.

Fackenheim insists that the Holocaust must continue to be resisted in contemporary society. Civilisation now includes death camps and Muselmänner; those who understand what took place in the Holocaust cannot overlook the rationally organised, systematic, excremental assault on the Jewish people. As a consequence, resistance to the Holocaust and the quest for *tikkun* have become never-ending imperatives. Further, Fackenheim stresses that only as a result of the deed of resistance can resisting thought be effective. In the case of those inmates who had the courage to act, thought and action were united: "Their recognition of the Nazi logic of destruction helped produce resistance to it – a life and death struggle that went on day and night." Just as the Holocaust was a *novum* in history, so too this resistance was a *novum* – it was a way of being and a way of thought. Fackenheim cites the example of Pelagia Lewinska, a Polish Catholic, who illuminatingly represents such a combination of thought and deed:

At the outset the living places, the ditches, the mud, the piles of excrement behind the blocks, had appalled me with their horrific filth. . . . and then I saw the light! I saw that it was not a question of disorder or lack of organization but that, on the contrary, a very thoroughly considered conscious idea was in the back of the camp's existence. They had condemned us to die in our own filth, to drown in mud, in our own excrement. They wished to abase us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface every vestige

of humanity. . . to fill us with horror and contempt towards ourselves and our fellows. . . From the instant when I grasped the motivating principle. . . it was as if I had been awakened from a dream. . . I felt under orders to live. . . And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being, I would hold on to my dignity. I was not going to become the contemptible, disgusting brute my enemy wished me to be. . . And a terrible struggle began which went on day and night.

For Fackenheim such commitment is of central importance. Lewinska felt obliged to resist and endure – her experience is evidence of God's commanding voice even though she did not explain why she felt under orders to carry out this responsibility.

Fackenheim believes that the rupture caused by the Holocaust must be mended by acts of *tikkun*. Previously Jewish mysticism described the disasters that afflicted Jewry as catastrophes within the Godhead; such rupture separated God from Himself. According to the mystics, reconciliation in the heavenly and earthly spheres can only be attained through prayer and ritual observance. In the modern world, however, acts of resistance must take the place of this religious activity. For Fackenheim the most profound reaction to the Holocaust is the establishment of a Jewish homeland for the survivors of the camps. In a Jewish state Jews are able to find a refuge and ensure that such catastrophes are never repeated. Fackenheim argues that post-Holocaust *tikkun* can only take place in Israel since there Jews are able to defend themselves without depending on others. Such *tikkun* involves religious as well as secular Jews who share a common inheritance – together they can ensure a Jewish survival in a world torn by the events of the Nazi period.

Israel and the Diaspora

Fackenheim stresses in an article in *Forum*, "On the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel", that the establishment of a Jewish state after nearly two thousand years of statelessness is of monumental significance. A new page of history was opened in which a series of *nova* were brought about. The first *novum* is the success of the ingathering. Prior to the creation of Israel, it was believed that Palestine had attained its absorptive capacity. But this judgment has been disproved. Zionism fulfilled its promise: it has provided a refuge for homeless Jews. The realisation of the Zionist dream

includes not only the provision of physical, economic and social space – Jews from throughout the world have become one nation. Coupled with its achievement is the establishment of a military required to defend the country from its enemies. In addition, the state has received international recognition. It has been endorsed by other countries; historic rights have been provided for its citizens; and a democratic government has been introduced. The ingathering has been so successful that it has silenced Jewish anti-Zionism. As Fackenheim notes, "After the ingathering, the consensus of 'good' Jews supports the state, and even lukewarm Jews pay lip service."

A second *novum* in contemporary society is the failure of *aliyah* (emigration) from Western countries. This has happened even though the establishment of a Jewish state is the most important achievement in nearly two millennia. According to Fackenheim, the failure of *aliyah* from Western democracies is a problem of major importance – Zionism is threatened if Jewry refuses to ensure Israel's continued existence. When Jews negate or deprecate the state in favour of liberal values, they are being self-destructive. Nevertheless, Fackenheim points out that there is a smaller *novum* connected with the failure of *aliyah*. There are many Jews living in North America who identify with the security and welfare of the state of Israel. Even though they are unwilling to settle there, they are committed to the Zionist ideal of providing a homeland for Jews who are oppressed and persecuted.

The third *novum* of contemporary Judaism is the depressing fact that the creation of Israel did not end anti-Semitism. Instead it has become a focus of hostility. Anti-Zionism is expressed repeatedly in numerous places including the United Nations. According to Zionist ideology, the establishment of a Jewish state was intended to eliminate anti-Semitism; in the years following the Second World War this hope was expressed by many Jews. But four decades later, it is clear that this has not occurred. There is world-wide resistance to the continued existence of a Jewish homeland. In the Soviet Union and in Arab lands, for example, there is deep-seated antipathy to Zionism. Fackenheim argues that the explanation for this hostility is grounded in the anti-Semitism of previous centuries. In the past, anti-Jewish sentiment was directed against Jewish individuals. It is now directed at the Jewish homeland.

Fackenheim argues that the only legitimate response to this new type of anti-Semitism is auto-emancipation. Jews must strengthen the state and express their intention that Israel must rely on its

own resources. This view is reinforced by the fourth *novum* of the contemporary Jewish experience: the collective Jewish confrontation with the Holocaust. Though the Holocaust was met with resistance by victims and survivors, the Jewish community did not confront the horrors of the death camps. It might be expected that with the passage of time the memory of these terrible events would fade, yet this has not happened. Instead it has become a central part of Jewish consciousness and a major factor in contemporary Jewish life. As Fackenheim explains:

The Holocaust was the climactic event, surpassable only in quantity but not in quality, of a bimillennial, unholy togetherness of groundless Jew-hatred and Jewish powerlessness. Following this event, Jews find themselves morally obliged, on their own behalf as well as that of the world, to break this togetherness. And since not they but only others can do away with the hatred, they must, so far as possible, do away with the powerlessness.

Fackenheim maintains that the Jewish people in a post-Holocaust world would have been morally and spiritually obliged to create a Jewish state if it had not already been established. This is so because there has been a radical alteration to the Jewish condition. After other catastrophes survivors could see themselves as a holy remnant, but Jews today are simply an accidental remnant and as such must ensure that Jewry continues. In Fackenheim's view Diaspora Judaism is now a spiritual impossibility: Jews today should make Israel their home. In the past the Torah was the fatherland of all Jews. But in contemporary society the *Oleh* (the immigrant to Israel) occupies the place once occupied by the *Talmud Hakham* (the Torah student). "What the Jew by birth can do in our time," he writes, "is to recognise that just as one kind of Jew – the Torah student – set the unifying standard for all Jews, so the standard is set today by another kind – the *Oleh*. Though thoroughly at home in his country of birth, the *Oleh* makes *aliyah* because of love." The Zionist enterprise thus serves as the paramount act of Jewish resistance in the post-Holocaust world – a testimony of obedience to God's Commanding Voice.

Critique

Throughout his writings Fackenheim asserts that out of Auschwitz

the Commanding Voice of God was heard – religious and secular Jews are commanded not to grant Hitler posthumous victories. The central difficulty with this position is that Fackenheim fails to give a justification for this claim. Instead of inspiring religious dedication, the Holocaust has made it increasingly difficult for many Jews to remain committed to the Jewish faith. For these individuals Fackenheim offers no explanation for his conviction that God was present at Auschwitz and is providentially concerned with the destiny of His chosen people. And for secular non-believing Jews Fackenheim's contention appears particularly ludicrous. If these Jews lack religious belief in the first place, there is simply no way they could respond to a divine command to adhere to their Jewishness. They might wish to remain Jews after the Holocaust, but this would not be because of a Voice from Auschwitz.

There are further difficulties attached to Fackenheim's conception of God's revelation at Auschwitz. If the Commanding Voice was real rather than metaphorical, it must have been heard during the Holocaust years. In *To Mend the World* Fackenheim explains that after he had come to the conclusion that the Holocaust was a radical challenge to the Jewish faith, his response was to formulate the 614th commandment. There is no doubt that Fackenheim's discussion of God's Commanding Voice has become extremely influential in the Jewish community; Jews today view the survival of the Jewish people and its traditions as a supreme priority, and Fackenheim has given expression to this aspiration. But if God was in fact present in the death camps and issued a command to the Jewish community, then it must have been heard by someone there who could afterwards testify to such a religious experience. However, there is no evidence that anybody actually received such a command, even including Fackenheim himself.

Regarding Fackenheim's conviction that the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz demands that Jews survive as Jews, traditional Judaism has always maintained that religious survival is mandatory. For the Orthodox, the Holocaust was not necessary for such an injunction to be disclosed. Throughout the biblical and rabbinic tradition, the conviction that Jewish survival is of cardinal importance is repeatedly expressed – in various ways the 613 commandments enshrine this belief. Thus there was no need for a further revelation in addition to what took place on Mount Sinai.

The doctrine of the 614th commandment is also problematic in

that it offers no solution to the issue of human suffering during the Nazi era. In confronting the horrors of the Holocaust, Fackenheim has depicted God as a Commanding Presence rather than as Saviour. Yet the question remains why He did not intervene to stop the atrocities of the death camps. Instead of offering an explanation of how the traditional understanding of God can be sustained in a post-Holocaust age, Fackenheim insists that such questioning must not take place. Such a stance fails to provide a meaningful religious response to those Jews who are perplexed about God's nature and activity in the world. Paradoxically his conception of the 614th commandment prohibits theological exploration instead of formulating a viable theory after Auschwitz.

Fackenheim's contention that the Holocaust was a unique event in human history is also beset with difficulties. The uniqueness of the Holocaust, he believes, consists in the fact that there was no rational purpose to this mass murder. Auschwitz was not a greater crime than others, but its uniqueness resides in the Nazis' groundless hatred directed indiscriminately against all Jews. For Fackenheim the Nazi era has deep existential significance, but this does not demonstrate that the Holocaust was of a different order from other catastrophes in the past. Arguably such a fixation on this Jewish tragedy diminishes other occasions of human suffering. Within a universalistic outlook the destruction of European Jewry is simply one terrible chapter in the history of man's inhumanity. It is understandable that Jews today would concentrate on this recent event, but Fackenheim provides no justification for assigning a qualitative difference to this tragedy. Moreover, it is questionable whether the Holocaust should be given a unique position in the catalogue of Jewish disasters. When placed alongside centuries of persecution – including slavery in Egypt, the destruction of the first and second Temples, the expulsion of Jews from European countries, and the Chmielnicki massacres – the Holocaust appears merely as the latest link in a long chain of Jewish suffering and death.

A final criticism of Fackenheim's position concerns his conception of *tikkun*. Resistance to the Holocaust, he believes, is the means by which a ruptured world can be mended. Further, he contends that a precondition of such mending involves the establishment of a Jewish state. While it is true that for the Jewish community such a response is vitally important, it is not at all clear how it could bring about the mending of the entire world. The Holocaust was a devastating catastrophe in the Jewish past, but when compared

with other modern calamities (such as the bombing at Hiroshima, the extermination of the Armenians in the First World War, the decimation of the Vietnamese) it lacks universal significance. Since society has been ruptured in so many ways this century, it is difficult to see in what sense Fackenheim's solution could bring about repair on a cosmic plane.

2. Is the revitalization of *Torah* Judaism a sufficient reason for the Holocaust to have occurred?

Ignaz Maybaum: The Holocaust and Modernity

An Austrian-born Reform rabbi, Ignaz Maybaum was actively involved in providing support for the Berlin Jewish community prior to the Second World War and later served as rabbi of Edgware Reform Synagogue in London. In The Face of God After Auschwitz, he argues that the Holocaust was part of God's providential plan. In his view, Hitler served as a divine instrument for the reconstruction of modern Jewish life.

Jewish Progress

The first *churban*, the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, the second *churban*, the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 by Rome, and the third *churban*, the destruction suffered by Jewry in the years 1933–1945, these catastrophes are 'a small moment', 'a little wrath', measured against the eternal love which God showers on his people.

After every *churban*, the Jewish people made a decisive progress and mankind progressed with us. After the first *churban* we became the people of the diaspora proving to the gentiles that a people can exist without the heathen attachment to its land. After the second *churban*, after the loss of the Temple, we made worship dependent on the spoken word alone. After the third *churban*, that of our own time, the Jewish diaspora is no longer limited to Ashkenazi and Sephardi regions, but has become a world-diaspora. The medieval organisation outside which God was not supposed to be found has been destroyed. You can be a Jew outside the *din*, outside the religious organisation as defined in the codes. The Middle Ages have come to an end. It is the same for us as it is for the Christian. He can be a Christian outside the Roman Church: at least we can all be citizens living in freedom. That is the blessed end of the Middle Ages, the end of the Empires, through the rise of democracy...

Thus Hitler came. He, the Nihilist, did what the progressive should have done but failed to do, he destroyed the Middle Ages, but did so by destroying the old Europe. The sins of a stagnant Europe, the sins of an isolationist America, the sins of the democracies, failing to progress

towards the solution of the new problems gave birth to Hitler. Of Nebuchadnezzar, the destroyer of Jerusalem, the word of God in the book of Jeremiah says: 'Nebuchadnezzar, my servant' (Jeremiah 27:6). Of Ashur who destroyed Samaria, Isaiah says that God himself called him to come. Would it shock you if I were to imitate the prophetic style and formulate the phrase: Hitler, my Servant? In the Book of Job, Satan is there, among the servants and messengers of God. Hitler was an instrument, in itself unworthy and contemptible. But God used this instrument to cleanse, to purify, to punish a sinful world; the six million Jews, they died an innocent death; they died because of the sins of others. Western man must, in repentance, say of the Jew what Isaiah says of the Servant of God: 'Surely, our diseases he did bear, and our pain he carried... he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities.' (Isaiah 53:4–5).

(Ignaz Maybaum, *The Face of God after Auschwitz*, Amsterdam, Polak and Van Censep, 1965, 66–67)

The Holocaust and Sacrifice

When the catastrophe came and the Davidic chapter of history came to an end with the destruction of Jerusalem and Samaria, the prophets said: it is our God who did it, the God of Israel. It was his judgement over the past. It was 'The Day of the Lord.' By saying so, the prophets found the formula for survival. When Samaria, the capital of Israel was destroyed in 722 BCE, the Jewish people, who suffered grievously, had, with the help of their prophets—as we read in our Hebrew Bible—the religious strength to celebrate God's victory over an evil, decadent chapter of history and to confess as suffering victims with no cooperation with the real leaders, their share in the sins of the condemned age. Therefore they survived and progressed hopefully to the next chapter of history.

We live now in the post Auschwitz era and look back to the *ante* Auschwitz era. It was, what Amos calls, 'the Day of the Lord', which created the division into a condemned past and into a new era. Before Auschwitz, there were various ideologies of political messianism, in which many thought they could shape the pattern of the future; they thought they could make history as they arranged their front gardens. They thought that they themselves and they alone could do it. They looked forward into the future which they regarded as a happy playground for their creative enterprise, forgetting the Creator, the

Maker of man and the Maker of history. The day of the Lord came: it was darkness and not light, it was a day of judgement which destroyed the pride of man and taught him his utter dependence on God. The six million who died innocently, died because no man is an island, because everyone is responsible for everyone else. The righteous are responsible for the sinners. The innocent who died in Auschwitz, not for the sake of their own sins, but because of the sins of others, atone for evil and are the sacrifice which is brought to the altar and which God acknowledges favourably. The six million, the dead of Auschwitz and of other places of horror, are Jews whom our modern civilisation has to canonise as holy martyrs; they died as sacrificial lambs because of the sins inherent in Western civilisation. Their death purified Western civilization so that it can again become a place where man can live, do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.

Auschwitz closes a past for everyone, for us Jews, of course, too. There are people amongst us who preach the same doctrines and talk in the same ideologies and party slogans which are familiar to us from pre-Auschwitz days. These people of yesterday offend our martyrs, they ignore their sacrifice. The day of the Lord, as a day of judgement, condemns the past. But in doing so, it opens the door to a new future. The martyr dies to give us, the Remnant, an atoned future, a new day, wonderful like every morning in which God renews his creation. (Ignaz Maybaum, *The Face of God after Auschwitz*, Amsterdam, Polak and Van Gemrep, 1965, 83-4)

Discussion

1. Is it blasphemous to conceive of Hitler as God's instrument?
2. Should those who died in the camps be viewed as sacrificial victims?

Sha'ar Yashuv Cohen: The Holocaust and the Messiah

Sha'ar Yashuv Cohen served as Chief Rabbi of Haifa. In 'Hester Panim in the Holocaust versus the Manifest Miracles in our Generation', he rejects the contention that the Holocaust is a punishment for sin. Rather, he argues that the Holocaust should be understood as part of the birth pangs of the Messiah initiating the redemption of the Jewish people.

The Holocaust and the Righteous

In 1943, when the first reports about the Holocaust arrived—these were not complete reports of the full extent of the Holocaust, but they already contained the terrible news of thousands and tens of thousands who went to the gas chambers and the crematoria—I was a student in the Merkaz ha-Rav Yeshiva, which had been founded by Rabbi Kook. I went up to the head of the *yeshiva*, Rabbi Charlap, the outstanding pupil of Rabbi Kook. . . . I gathered my courage, went in, and raised the following question: one of the foundations of our faith is that we are the people chosen by God. . . . Then how was it possible that this chosen people must suffer more than any other people, to the extent that hundreds of thousands and millions of its sons were sacrificed on the altar, with no explanation of reward and punishment? . . .

Rabbi Charlap said, it would seem that all of our educational and public activity aspires to inculcate the awareness that we suffer because we have forsaken the ways of the Lord; in consequence, we are punished, and all these evils come upon us; and the proper response to this is to repent. . . . If so, it is proper for the people of Israel to say, 'in that day: "Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?" and why we should receive an even greater punishment for this, namely, "And I will surely hide my face in that day."'

Rabbi Charlap explained this question and the statement that 'our God is not among us' as follows: tribulations and sufferings are beyond the bounds of nature. They are a decisive proof for the believing Jew that we are not a people like all the others, but rather, 'Thus is the way of this nation: when they go up, they ascend to the heavens; and when they go down, they descend to the dust'. We are not like the other peoples regarding the profundity of the sufferings, tragedies and sacrifices we endure, nor are we similar to the non-Jewish peoples regarding the destiny of Israel. Great things await us; great things have happened to us in the past, and even more wondrous things will be our lot in the future. We have no explanations for any of these events, but we must understand that this is apparently the last phase in the birth pangs of the Messiah, before the redemption that will come for us. Casting doubt upon this fundamental of faith is the most extreme form of *Hester Panim*, the act of concealing—but it is intended to cause the people of Israel to repent. This repentance is not only to the Torah of Israel, and not only to the commandments, but it is also to the land of Israel. There is no graver sin than Jews living in the diaspora, despite

God's Providence and the Death Camps: Ignaz Maybaum

Holocaust as churban

Like Bernard Maza, the British Reform theologian Ignaz Maybaum in *The Face of God after Auschwitz* believes that the Holocaust was the result of divine providence. But in contrast to Maza, Maybaum argues that God did not pour out His fury to revitalise Torah Judaism. Rather Maybaum believes that the six million Jews who died in the concentration camps were chosen by God to become sacrificial victims in order to bring about God's purposes for the modern world.

At the beginning of this study, Maybaum writes that since 1933 he had struggled to make sense of what happened during the Nazi period. "The events of the years 1933-1945 seemed unparalleled in mankind's history," he states. "Many Jews were stunned into silence, some into the religious rebellion of Job. God has allowed to happen what has happened; where is God? Slowly attempts were made to emerge from the grip of the nightmare and to find both a logical and a religious response."

To explain such horrors, Maybaum contends that the Jewish world has experienced three major disasters, each of which he refers to as a *churban* – an event of utter destructiveness. A *churban* is an operation in which God, like a surgeon, cuts out a part from the body of mankind so that a new span of life can begin in revived health. The first *churban* was the destruction of the Temple of Solomon by Nebuchadnezzar which made the Jews a diaspora (outside Israel) people. For the first time in history there was a nation without land which nevertheless believed it had a holy mission. It might be thought that the uprooting of the Jewish population from its

native soil was an utter disaster, but Maybaum contends that this was not so. The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC enabled the Jewish community to bring knowledge of God and Torah to the pagan nations beyond Judea's borders: if Israel had not gone into exile, such knowledge would have remained confined to the Jews. Thus the first *churban* was an act of creative destruction brought about by divine providential decree.

The second *churban* destroyed the Temple of Herod and thereby established the synagogue as a fundamental institution within Jewish life. For the first time, mankind saw an example of a form of worship in which no blood was shed. Instead, prayer took the place of sacrifice and worship was constituted by the spoken word alone. This catastrophic event enabled the Jews to make decisive spiritual progress which subsequently enlightened human religious awareness. In this regard Maybaum is anxious to point out that neither the expulsion from Spain nor the massacre of Ukrainian Jews by Chmielnicki and his followers should be understood in the same way as the destruction of the Second Temple in AD 70. These disasters were not examples of a *churban*; rather both events should be understood simply as *gezeirot* (evil decrees). A *churban* is a catastrophe which ends an old era and inaugurates a new period of renewal – it achieves progress through sacrifice. In the case of the Spanish expulsion and the Chmielnicki pogrom, such progress did not take place.

The third *churban* in Jewish history was the death of six million Jews in concentration camps during the Second World War. To explain the progress brought about by such devastation, Maybaum recounts events from his own life. "My mother died in Theresienstadt, my two sisters and other relatives died in Auschwitz. Can I bring myself to conceive any kind of progress coming as a consequence of the third *churban*? Exodus is progress. The Remnant must remain the people believing in God, the Redeemer from Egypt." Six million Jewish martyrs perished in the camps. But two-thirds of the Jewish community survived – these survivors constitute a Saving Remnant. "We are the Remnant," he writes, "and of this we must speak with the Halleluyah of the redeemed at the Red Sea."

For Maybaum, the exodus narrative in the Bible is full of awe. When Jews participate in the Passover *seder*, Maybaum urges them to be attentive to what is holy and terrible. In particular, they should focus on God's redemptive act at the Red Sea. With an outstretched

arm and a mighty hand, God divided the water, rescued His chosen people, and destroyed the Egyptians. Through such an act of creative destruction, the Jewish people escaped from slavery into freedom.

Reading the narrative of the exodus at Passover, Jews encounter the "awful" God who visited in Auschwitz. In this latter act of creative destruction the home of Eastern European Jewry was destroyed; yet in this devastation God manifests His awe. "How *nora*, how awful, are the acts of God," Maybaum states, "who is merciful, and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth" (Exod. 34:6). Auschwitz was "the day of the Lord" of which Amos said: "It is darkness not light". Nevertheless these horrors led to progress. It is the Jews' prophetic task to interpret Auschwitz as an awful portent (*mophet*) in the exodus from our past into the future. Understanding the Holocaust in this way, the Jewish community need not be embarrassed. In the Hebrew Bible the prophets were called upon to interpret the calamitous events of their own day – the same task applies to Jewry today.

According to Maybaum, Hitler should be understood as an instrument of God's will. In Scripture, Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as the destroyer of Jerusalem; nonetheless he is referred to as "Nebuchadnezzar, my servant" (Jer. 27:6). Again, Isaiah proclaimed that Ashur who destroyed Samaria had been used by God to do His will. Similarly, Maybaum argues that Hitler was a servant of the Lord. Though Hitler was himself unworthy and contemptible, God "used this instrument to purify, to punish a sinful world; the six million Jews; they died an innocent death; they died because of the sins of others." Thus Western man must say of the Jew what Isaiah said of the servant of God: "Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pain he carried. . . he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquity" (Isa. 53:4-5). After the Second World War when Jews realised the scale of the tragedy in Europe, they had only Job's submission as a response. But in place of Job's attitude, contemporary Jewry must adopt the prophetic stance of Isaiah 54. Here the joy of progress is expressed in relation to divine renewal. As Maybaum proclaims, "Eighteen years after the era of Auschwitz, the welcome to the new era inspires us with hope and joy."

Maybaum insists that as a surviving Remnant, the Jewish community must change. Jews must eliminate indifference, pettiness and

lazy thought from their lives. They must become better Jews than they were before the *churban*, more devoted to the holy tradition. "Let the *churban* change you into Jews who are aware that justice and mercy and truth are holy attributes of God and the foundation of human life. . . Blot out everything from your mind which separates you from God. Blot out the idea that a Jewish generation is permitted to remain after the *churban* what it was before the *churban*." According to Maybaum God wants Jews to be nearer to Him, progressing towards the goal of history – towards justice, mercy and peace. With regard to the German nation, the Jewish people must in the light of God's nature aspire to forgive Germany for its inhumanity – love must be granted to all of God's children, among whom the Germans are also numbered. Hate, Maybaum believes, is self-destructive. Jews, more than others, need redemption from hatred. They need it as the condition for continuing to live. The third *churban* thus has the power to transform Jewish consciousness. Viewed in this way, it is possible to wipe away our tears and say, "*Ma'assei Eloheinu*": "Wonderful works of God, full of awe, preparing in mercy the way through the desert and leading us forward to the promised land."

The Suffering Servant

Central to Maybaum's understanding is his conviction that the Holocaust was the result of God's will. In the case of the exodus from Egypt, God acted with trials, signs, wonders, war, a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and great terrors (Deut. 4:32). For Maybaum, the third *churban* was also full of terror. In this tragedy the servant-of-God passages in the book of Isaiah provide the framework for comprehending God's plan for mankind. In Auschwitz, Maybaum argues, Jews suffered vicarious death for the sins of mankind. Of the martyr-servant it is written: "Behold, my servant shall succeed, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high" (Isa. 52:13). Those who died in the gas chambers are similarly exalted.

Leo Baeck, the distinguished Reform rabbi and leader of German Jewry, for example, came out from Theresenstadt and brought with him a message in which he interpreted the Book of Daniel. Here the author who lived at the time of religious persecution asked: what happens to those who died and will not see the liberation, soon

and surely to come? The answer was that they do not die into the grave; they die into the eternity of God.

In his discussion of the role of the Jewish people in God's plan for humanity, Maybaum contends that Auschwitz is the twentieth-century Calvary of the Jewish people. The Golgotha of modern mankind is Auschwitz – the Cross has been replaced by the gas chamber. According to Maybaum, the Golgotha of Auschwitz was nothing other than a place of slaughter where pagans discarded their Christian teachings: "Golgotha with Christianity absenting itself became a place of skulls. Auschwitz is the pagan Golgotha of our time," he writes. "A Christianity withdrawn from the responsibility of history shares the responsibility for the twentieth-century Golgotha of six million Jews." Thus despite the sincere fellowship expressed by many Christians towards Jews today, it must not be forgotten that the Church was largely a silent and bystander as millions of Jews were murdered in the death camps.

Maybaum is also anxious to connect the martyrdom of the victims of Nazi persecution with the sacrificial system of ancient Israel. The ceremony of atonement, he points out, was a central part of the Temple cult. In Scripture we read about the High Priest, animal sacrifice, and the blood of the offering which was sprinkled on the altar. After this ceremony the High Priest, his family and all the people praised the Lord and then prayed, "Blessed be the name of the glory of His Kingdom for ever." In Auschwitz the Jewish people was both the High Priest and the sacrificial lamb. The victims died because of the sins of others. As a result, the world is cleaner because the passion of savagery was spent and because modern views of technical progress have revealed their nihilism leading to destruction. The work of atonement had been fulfilled. In the tragedy of Auschwitz the Jewish people was victimised and through this vicarious suffering atonement has been granted to future generations.

In formulating this conception of sacrificial atonement Maybaum points out that the modern age is a time of martyrdom. Once the death of those who were murdered by the Nazis is understood as holy martyrdom, it is possible to return to God. The result of these murders was to bring God back to the world which had forsaken Him. In the Hebrew Bible the servant is the witness who makes the martyrdom visible. The martyrdom of six million Jews is therefore not simply a national catastrophe – it is an assault against humanity. The Jew represents mankind – in the words of

the medieval philosopher Judah Ha-Levi, the Jew without mankind is like the heart in the body. If the heart is sick, the limbs become weak and decay. The pogrom of *Kristallnacht* was the prelude to this calamity, and disaster followed which devastated the whole world. Poland, Eastern Europe and parts of Russia were decimated; German cities were in ruins; Great Britain was bombed as was Pearl Harbour; the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. This apocalyptic Holocaust began with the Nazis' pogrom of anti-Semitism.

Yet those who died were only one-third of the Jewish nation. The surviving two-thirds constitute the "Remnant". This is not a numerical calculation, but rather a theological concept. The idea of a saving Remnant is based on Isaiah's prophetic message that the remnant will return (*shear yashuv*). This is not a mathematical probability but a miraculous act – a miracle whereby the Jewish people will remain in God's presence. As Maybaum explains, "In your very life a miracle is manifestly visible to you, as visible as your hand before your eyes. Where there is a miracle, there is One who works the miracle. In belonging to the Remnant, to those saved by the miracle, you have God in your life and you can return to Him." Those who perished in the death camps will have died in vain only if they are not revered as witnesses and martyrs to the Lord.

Farewell to the Middle Ages

For Maybaum the *churban* brings about progress through sacrifice. But what kind of development took place? Maybaum insists that this catastrophe brought about an end to the medieval period. The structure of medieval society which survived for centuries in Europe was eliminated. Hitler did what should have been done by others. The old order of Eastern European Jewry was exterminated in the gas chambers; after Auschwitz this large segment of the Jewish people who lived an essentially medieval lifestyle came to an end.

In the Middle Ages lord and vassal were bound together by an authoritarian hierarchy. This system of social differentiation created a pyramid in which inequality became the primary social binding force. The Caesar as pope or emperor made the Middle Ages the heir of Roman imperialism. In this environment there was simply no place for Jewry. Jews were the killers of Christ, and thus provisionally destined to be punished for their sin. Hitler was

viewed by many as a crusader – Auschwitz was the place where the directors of the Inquisition did their work in the midst of the twentieth century. Yet Hitler accomplished what the progressives should have done – he destroyed the old Europe.

The end of the Middle Ages means the passing of Jewish submission. It is not merely small isolated groups of the Jewish nation who have been freed, but the whole of the Jewish community is now Westernised. Jewry can emancipate itself from the enforced compliance of Jewish religious life and dismiss the medieval mentality which separated one community from another, making Zionism necessary. While remaining loyal to the citizens of Israel, *diaspora* Jewry can realise that the Holy Land is not a country on the shores of the Mediterranean; it is rather mankind's future. The exodus from the Middle Ages is thus assured. In Western democracies Jew and Christian meet as equals: they are to be treated in the same fashion before the law. Such equality breaks down the barriers between Jew and non-Jew and offers to them both an opportunity to enrich the world in different ways. The Jewish people has forged its spears into ploughshares and now sees the betterment of mankind as its goal.

This transformation of Jewish life means that Jews are free to live outside the previously imposed constraints of Jewish law. The rabbis in the medieval codes made an attempt to bind together the dispersed of the Jewish people into a compact unity by the enslavement of the *din*, the form of religious life. This legal system was identical for every Jew no matter where he lived. Just as the medieval Church decreed that salvation was not possible outside the Church, so the medieval codes stipulated that it is impossible to be a Jew outside the context of Jewish law. Yet this attitude no longer holds true. The whole of the Jewish community now lives under the circumstances of Western civilisation. The many rituals and practices of Jewish life previously formed the barriers that separated Jew from Gentile far more effectively than the ghetto walls. But now that the third *churban* has occurred, the Jewish people live outside this communally imposed legal system. Jews today must make personal decisions about which aspects of the Jewish tradition are spiritually significant under the conditions of democracy and Western civilisation.

In his discussion of medieval life Maybaum draws attention to the degradation of women. In the Middle Ages Jews living in

Islamic lands were influenced by the prevailing culture. In the Orthodox synagogue the curtain separating women from men and thereby preventing them from participating fully in the service is a reflection of Islamic practice. This medieval discrimination against women was built into the Jewish legal tradition, but today it has been superseded by a spirit of equality. For Maybaum the principle of equal treatment of the sexes is based on the biblical creation – God created man in his image, male and female He created them. Each Jew regardless of sex is thus chosen by God. The Midrash states that it was because of the merit of Jewish women that the Jews were redeemed from Egypt. Each woman must say: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe, who hast made me a woman and by that has chosen me". In this way it is possible for modern Jews to transcend the medieval narrowness of mind and spirit as the Jewish tradition comes of age in contemporary society.

Maybaum points out that there are some Jewish writers who view the Middle Ages nostalgically. They portray the poverty and unhygienic narrowness of the Eastern European village (*shtetl*) in positive terms. They romanticise *shtetl* life as a Jewish paradise with saintly piety. But Maybaum insists that no one would want to return to such a former existence.

"Sometimes I feel I want to ask these writers the question," he writes, "would you like to leave your Manhattan flat or your cosy British suburban home and live under the conditions in which your parents and grandparents lived, in the dire straits and humiliating status of civic inequality? The honest answer is obvious. Nobody wants to go back and everybody must admit he benefits from what can only be described as progress. Progress has taken place, the progress from the Middle Ages to the modern age of Western civilisation and democracy."

According to Maybaum, every Jew must admit he or she benefits from such changed circumstances. It is terrible that such advancement was paid for by the death of six million martyrs. But it is not for us to understand God's ways. It remains only for those who survived to praise the works of God, and in the words of the Psalmist confess that His ways are beyond our understanding.

The dawn of a new age

After Auschwitz the human imagination is not the same. A new era

has commenced which will either drive us away from everything that brought about the Nazi monstrosities, or lead in an identical direction. With Auschwitz a dam burst in Europe. Now that the Holocaust has taken place, we must face a hitherto unknown aspect of human existence. Having looked into the abyss, twentieth-century man can perceive that hope for the future rests on greater charity and compassion. "The globe populated with numerous races must become our concern," Maybaum states. "The whole earth can become devastated by 'the bomb', and entire races can be wiped out by barbarism." In this context only the biblical view concerning the world as a creation of God, and every human being as created in His image, can save us from utter catastrophe.

In proclaiming this message, Maybaum refers to the teaching of Leo Baeck after the war. When Baeck arrived in London, he gave an important lecture in which he declared that progress had emerged out of Jewish suffering. For Baeck, human advancement is like a spiral leading onward in spite of numerous setbacks. In his commentary on the Book of Daniel, Baeck spoke of redeeming change because God exists who "changeth the times and the seasons" (Dan. 2.24). Progress is attained not by powers immanent in history; it comes from another place (Esther 4.12). Hope is vision and power, transcending the temporal sphere, reaching realms beyond the historical situation. When Mordecai in the Book of Esther regarded the barren and hopeless situation that surrounded him, he declared: "Relief and deliverance will arise to the Jews from another place."

Working with God, humanity can progress. Such development is not illusory as long as it is directed to the building of the Kingdom of God. Those who proceed in this fashion are not taught by philosophers to do so; they are sent on their journey by divine decree. The directives of history guide humanity to the next crossroads. In a period which denies the realm transcending history, people live on borrowed capital. But when these resources are exhausted, nothing will be left to quench humanity's spiritual thirst. Human beings without God do not live in an historical process which develops along Marxist or Hegelian lines. Jews must not be atheistic or agnostic humanists. But at the same time, it is important that they co-operate with those who work to improve civilisation. Judaism without participation in this enterprise becomes escapist pietism. We should accept the peace which Western civilisation offers.

Jewish messianism views time as a linear process towards the end of history when the realm of truth, justice and love will have arrived. Within this eschatological unfolding of the divine plan, the Jew is content to wait for the future. The future is not the repetition of the past or the present, but a new epoch. The Jewish benediction which thanks God "who hast placed eternity into our midst" cannot be spoken by philosophers who project their own vision of an ideal society into the future. Embracing the positive benefits of contemporary culture, Jews must labour to establish God's Kingdom on earth.

In the Bible, history is not separated from God's creation. There is no Hebrew word for nature nor does Scripture have a concept of history determined solely by human beings. Implicit in the biblical messianic hope is a notion of progress – messianic redemption belongs to "the time of the end" (Dan. 8.17), to what shall be in "the end of days" (Dan. 2.28).

But what about those who suffer death before the consummation of history? For Baeck, there is a distinction between horizontal and vertical messianism. Historical messianism as portrayed in the Book of Daniel is different from biblical messianism. Progress in time was replaced by progress away from time. Upward ascent was substituted for linear progression. The present world (*olam hazeh*) was seen as the world below, whereas the world to come (*olam haba*) was viewed as the world above. In the Book of Daniel vertical messianism provides consolation for those who die before the time of persecution ends. We do not die into the grave; we die into the eternity of God. In horizontal messianism, Baeck asserts this conception is implicit – human beings looking forward to redemption will also look upwards.

Continuing his discussion of Western emancipation, Maybaum explores the tension that exists today between Eastern and Western Jewry. This tension is misunderstood if the approach of Westernised Jews is seen only as passive assimilation and the attitude of Eastern European Jews is hailed as authentic traditionalism. The fact is that in the controversy between these two groups, the issue that divides them is only indirectly a Jewish one. Westernisation slowly reaches those parts of the world which have stagnated for centuries – only when they have awakened to the possibilities of human emancipation do they join the forward march of humanity. Autonomy is presently rejected by Eastern European Jewry because of its medieval dogma of sacred tradition. The medieval Jew had the

Holy Writ before him in his big folio volume; in the middle of the page was the text surrounded by commentaries. The result was the impression that the difference between past, present and future – the eternal rhythms of history – did not matter. The Jew with his books lived in an atmosphere of timelessness.

But timelessness and eternity are not the same. Timelessness is an illusion whereas eternity refers to God's infinity. The feeling of timelessness aroused by the study of sacred texts became an escape, a mechanism which sustained the Jewish people through the darkness of the Middle Ages. But this approach needs to be supplemented by messianism, by the biblical prophets' view of history and its goal for the Jewish people to be a light to the nations. Modern historical theology has destroyed the pyramid-like solidity and oneness of the past which was embraced by the medieval mind. As Maybaum writes, "The moment the historian found it necessary to judge one particular period of Jewish history as a period of decline, he searched for another period that did not display the sickness of decline, but presented Judaism in its classical grandeur and force. The whole of Jewish history became visible as a road with descents and ascents, with mountains reaching to heaven and chasms leading through cultural deserts."

In replacing the medieval with the modern approach, contemporary Jewish historiography put an end to the concept of history as a long-drawn-out story of miracles and a continuous chain of legends about saintly individuals. Historical reality became the place where God encountered man. The medieval dream has thus ended. Western man now takes history seriously. In this regard he has moved closer to the Hebrew Bible than was possible in a medieval atmosphere. Western man now has a dominant place on the stage of history. The remnant of the Jewish nation – the survivors of the third *churban* – have become increasingly Westernised, and with the rise of Western civilisation the Jew will arise too. Out of the depths into which the catastrophe of our time plunged the Jewish people, there is hope for the future.

It is the prophetic task of the Jewish nation to interpret Auschwitz as an awful portent (*mophet*) in the exodus from the past into the future. In the post *churban* era, Western civilisation can be the mediating agent which brings to humanity what God has planned: justice, kindness and peace. Through the Jewish enlightenment movement (*Haskalah*), Zionism and socialism, Jews previously attempted to bring Western ideas and the blessings of a Western

way of life to East European Jewry. This task failed – yet the terrible efficiency of Auschwitz achieved this goal.

As Jews say farewell to the long tradition of the Jewish people in the Middle Ages, they must be sustained by prophetic faith. Archaic traditions cannot serve them on their journey into the future. Only listening to God can help them after the breakdown of their faithfully preserved heritage. In the hour of the *churban*, the great and awful destruction of the medieval world, God calls the Jewish people as He did in ancient times: "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (Amos 4.12).

Critique

There are a number of important problems with Maybaum's interpretation of the events of the Holocaust. First, it does not make sense to think that God entered into a covenantal relationship with the Jewish people only to crucify them. Maybaum contends that like Nebuchadnezzar, Hitler was an instrument of God; yet if God is omnipotent there would have been no need to murder six million Jews to inaugurate a new epoch in human history. The conception of the *churban* requires that we believe that God created the horrors of the Nazi regime and consigned the Jews to be destroyed. But such an understanding runs counter to the traditional Jewish belief that God is compassionate, merciful and longsuffering. While Maybaum appears to follow the doctrine of omnipotence to its seemingly logical conclusion (God must be the cause of the Holocaust), he does not defend His attributes of love and justice. For most Jews it would be impossible to believe in a God who would be the source of the terrors of the death camps. To make Hitler an instrument of creative destruction would be to devalue the significance of the lives of those who died in the concentration camps. For these reasons Maybaum's depiction of God's activity would no doubt strike the faithful as blasphemous heresy.

A second difficulty with Maybaum's presentation is his use of Christian categories to explain Jewish suffering. According to Maybaum, those Jews who died in the concentration camps were vicarious victims – the Christs of our age. Here there is a misunderstanding of the belief that Christ died for the sins of mankind. Christians make this declaration because of their conviction that Jesus is God incarnate. Through the crucifixion God takes on the

sins of mankind: He is vicariously atoning for all people. Thus there is no cruelty in Christ's death on the cross, rather the outpouring of divine love. Further, Christ died voluntarily so that others may live. This was clearly not the case with the six million Jews who died at the hand of the Nazis. If Maybaum is correct, God would have been sacrificing others rather than Himself, since those who died in the camps went unwillingly to their deaths. For Maybaum, the crucifixion symbolises vicarious atonement, but this is not a viable analogy with the Holocaust. It seems incomprehensible that the *Einsatzgruppen* and the gas chambers of the death camps provide a basis for sacrificial expiation. Even more perplexing is the implication of the belief that God used the Nazis to fulfil His divine plan of human redemption. If the Holocaust is the result of God's will, then all those who resisted the German onslaught must be seen as rebels against the divine intention.

Another complication with Maybaum's view concerns his conception of *churban*. The concept of progress achieved through sacrifice is essentially a non-Jewish idea; although the ancient Israelites worshipped God through sacrifice, its purpose was to appease God or to make expiation. It would be a mistake to think that biblical Jews viewed the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC as a blessing. The devastation of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile were seen and continue to be viewed as major tragedies in the history of the nation. For this reason Jews throughout their history have mourned these events on Tisha B'av. Moreover, it is not at all clear what spiritual progress has been achieved through a third *churban*. The world does not seem to be a better place: there has been mass murder in Uganda, Biafra, Vietnam, Cambodia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, India, Pakistan, and parts of Central and South America. While the Jewish community has largely shed its medieval character, this is only one relatively insignificant aspect of modern history. As yet, there seems no way to sustain Maybaum's contention that Auschwitz has brought about world spiritual advancement.

There are also complications with his vision of Jewish progress. According to Maybaum, the process of emancipation enabled Jews to discard what he considers out-moded aspects of the Jewish heritage. Western Jewry has thus advanced beyond the ghetto mentality of medieval Judaism. But is this transcendence of traditional Judaism a positive development? Those Jews who have adopted the *mores* of Western society have largely abandoned

the richness of the Jewish tradition. For the majority of Jews living in Western lands the Jewish legal code has ceased to have any relevance; similarly most Jews are painfully ignorant of rabbinic sources as well as the mystical and theological traditions of their faith. If such treasures are set aside, it is difficult from a Jewish perspective to see how the emergence of the modern age has ushered in God's redemptive plan for His chosen people. Furthermore, the Holocaust as a contemporary manifestation of anti-Semitism could be seen as an ultimate condemnation of modernity. In the Middle Ages Jews were massacred, but genocide never took place because of the lack of technical capability. Western civilisation however has produced the means by which mass murder can take place on a vast scale. Indeed, it was arguably the emancipation of the Jews which paved the way for the events of the Nazi era. In the medieval period Jews were denied citizenship rights – in the last two centuries Jewry has entered into the mainstream of Western culture. The appearance of the Jews in all spheres of modern life has provoked the most extreme reactions leading to the Nazi conviction that Europe must become *Judenrein* (free of Jews).

Another objection to Maybaum's thesis about the advent of the modern age concerns the potential dissolution of the Jewish community. Sociologists have emphasised the demographic decline of world Jewry. Some rather extreme studies, for example, have suggested that the American Jewish community will decrease from approximately six million to 250,000; other more moderate predictions envisage a decline of about 30 per cent. This shrinkage would be due to indifference, assimilation, intermarriage, and the low birth rate among Jews. Such a decrease in the size of the Jewish community is a high price to pay for Jewish emancipation.

Again, there is little sign of hope that there will be a radical transformation in the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in contemporary society. Though positive Jewish-Christian encounter is more a reality today than in the past, the conflict in the Middle East has placed Jews in all lands in an increasingly precarious position. Widespread anti-Zionist sentiment has produced friction between Jews and their neighbours. And, as far as Arab hostility is concerned, the existence of a Jewish state has made Jews vulnerable wherever they live. Thus there is little reason to believe that the advent of the modern age has contributed to Jewish welfare and security.

A final defect of Maybaum's view relates to his belief that the

Jewish community is God's suffering servant. The state of Israel negates this hypothesis – Israeli Jews reject their former condition of powerlessness in the face of oppression. For Maybaum, diaspora Jewry represents the fulfilment of God's redemptive plan – Jewish emancipation was the divinely ordained result of the Holocaust. Through such liberation from medievalism, he believes, Jews are able to be a light to the nations. It is thus diaspora Jewry rather than the state of Israel which is able to bring about the building of God's kingdom on earth. For most Jews such a vision has little significance. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Jews in all lands have looked to Israel as their salvation in a hostile world. For Jewry worldwide the Holocaust and the subsequent establishment of a Jewish state are organically related events, not as the unfolding of God's plan but as a sign of hope for the future.

Maybaum's presentation of the Holocaust as the third *churban* in God's plan for the redemption of mankind is therefore flawed in several respects. Like Maza, Maybaum attempts to explain Jewish suffering and death by utilising concepts from the Bible. Both writers have insisted that God was present in the death camps. Yet Maybaum's presentation affirms God's omnipotence at the cost of divine love, for though two-thirds of the Jewish people survived, six million innocent victims died in the most horrific fashion. And the advent of the modern world, which Maybaum so enthusiastically welcomes, is itself full of dangers for the Jewish people and for humanity as well. Thus Maybaum's interpretation of divine theodicy fails to provide an adequate answer to the question why an all-powerful and all-good God could have allowed His chosen people to perish at the hands of the Nazis.

Revelation and Mass Murder: *Emil Fackenheim*

The challenge of the Holocaust

Like Ignaz Maybaum, the Jewish philosopher and theologian Emil Fackenheim offers a positive theological response to the Holocaust in a wide range of writings. In his early work he did not directly address the problem of this event. But in his later writings he recognised that the Holocaust raises the most central religious issues for modern Jewry. The turning point in his own thinking began when he discovered that Jews were committed to Jewish survival in the face of the tragedy of the death camps. "Not until I found this scandal (of Auschwitz)," he wrote, "did I make what to me was, and still is, a momentous discovery. Jews throughout the world – rich and poor, learned and ignorant, believer and unbeliever – were already responding to Auschwitz, and in some measure had been doing so all along. Faced with the radical threat of extinction, they were stubbornly defying it, committing themselves, if to nothing more, to the survival of themselves and their children as Jews."

In discussing the Holocaust, Fackenheim distinguishes between the attempt to account for this occurrence and the desire to make a genuine religious response. The first quest, he believes, is blasphemous. Those who seek to explain the horrors of the Nazi period believe they can categorise these events in various theological frameworks such as sin and punishment. For Fackenheim, however, these solutions do not take into account their full terror. What is required instead is a sensitive awareness of the enormity of this catastrophe. Rather than trying to elucidate the Holocaust, Fackenheim has searched for an authentic response. There are several reasons why this was necessary. First, the Holocaust had already

Human Suffering

God, blessed be he, is to be found in his inner chambers weeping, so that one who pushes in and comes close to him by means of studying Torah, weeps together with God, and studies Torah with him. Just this makes the difference: the weeping, the pain which a person undergoes by himself, alone, may have the effect of breaking him, of bringing him down, so that he is incapable of doing anything. But the weeping which the person does together with God—that strengthens him. He weeps—and is strengthened; he is broken—but finds courage to study and teach. It is hard to raise one's self up, time and again, from the tribulations, but when one is determined, stretching his mind to connect to the Torah and divine service, then he enters the Inner Chambers where the blessed Holy One is to be found; he weeps and wails together with him, as it were, and even finds the strength to study Torah and serve him.

(Kalonimus Kalman Shapira, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. Nehemiah Polen, Northvale, New Jersey, Jason Aronson, 1994, 119)

Discussion

1. Should innocent victims have to suffer for the sins of past generations?
2. Is it plausible to believe that God is afflicted when a Jew is afflicted?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Human Free Will

OLSHAN

Eliezer Berkovits: The Holocaust and Human Free Will

A Romanian-born Orthodox rabbi, Eliezer Berkovits was Chairman of the Department of Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew Theological College in Chicago. In Faith after the Holocaust, he argues that religious belief is possible after the nightmare of the crematoria. In his view, the problem of faith can be solved by appealing to the free will argument. If God did not respect human freedom, not only would morality be abolished, but men and women would cease to be human. Freedom and responsibility are the very essence of humanity—if human beings are to exist, they must be allowed to sin. In this light, the Holocaust must be seen as an expression of human evil, a tragedy inflicted by the Nazis on the Jewish people. God did not intervene to save the Jewish nation because he had bestowed free will on humanity at creation. In the face of the Holocaust, the Jew must adopt a Job-like stance, believing in God's goodness despite the flames of the crematoria. In a later work, With God in Hell, he depicts those who remained faithful in the death camps.

Free Will and the Hidden God

We have to concern ourselves with the question of the absence of God, the problem of *El Mistater*, the hiding of God. For the radical theologian the absence of God means the death of God. Altrizer discusses this aspect of our subject in the following terms:

God is not simply hidden from view, nor is he lurking in the depth of our unconscious or on the boundaries of our infinite space, nor will he appear on the next turn of an historical wheel. Totally committed as he is to the full epiphany of faith in the concrete moment before him, the contemporary Christian accepts the death of God as a final and irrevocable event.¹

Here too, as so often, Altizer's meaning is somewhat obscure. As other passages in his writing show, Altizer believes that the Christian dogma of God's descent into the flesh represents the death of God as an event in history. At that moment, the transcendental God actually collapsed into imminent humanity. Thus he perished. He is unique among the radical theologians with his interpretation. But they have all in common the inability to acknowledge the concept of a 'hiding God' so important, for instance, in the theology of an Isaiah. We believe that this too is the result of their original Christian background. The 'hiding God' can hardly be an authentic Christian idea. The entire purpose of the incarnation in Christianity is salvation, to lift man out of his profane existence and give him reality as a new being in the realm of eternity. This is the function of the saviour, to be accomplished in the epiphany of the Christian faith. By its very nature it can be achieved by a God who reveals himself; by the visible breaking of the transcendental into the realm of the profane. This very nature of this God incarnate is divinity made manifest. This God cannot hide for he saves by his self-revelation. A Saviour-God cannot not save. If he is in hiding, he does not save. If he does not save, he is not; his death is final and irrevocable.

The hiding God is present; though man is unaware of him, He is present in his hiddenness. Therefore, God can only hide in this world. But if this world were altogether and radically profane, there would be no place in it for Him to hide. He can only hide in history. Since history is man's responsibility, one would, in fact, expect him to hide, to be silent, while man is about his God-given task. Responsibility requires freedom, but God's convincing presence would undermine the freedom of human decision. God hides in human responsibility and human freedom. However, where there is no room for history, where redemption lies, not in a process of sanctification, but in the transfiguration of a profane existence into a new birth in eternity, there God cannot hide. He must be visible in the miracle of salvation; he saves by his epiphany. There is no room in Christianity for the hiding God. If he does not walk with me, if he does not talk to me, if he is absent, he is not, he is dead. This is the conclusion drawn correctly by the radical theologian from the absence of God.

(Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, New York, KTAV, 1973, 63-64)

Job and the Modern Jew

The questioning of God's providence in the death camps was taking place within the classical tradition of Judaism. Unfortunately, unlike the case of Job, God remained silent to the very end of the tragedy and the millions in the concentration camps were left alone to shift for themselves in the midst of infinite despair. To this day, theologians are arguing about the meaning of God's answer to Job. Be that as it may, one thing is certain: in the denouement God appears to Job. He makes himself known to him. Thus Job is able to find peace with God in the words: 'I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now mine eye seeth Thee; Wherefore I abhor my words, and repent.' Seeing I am dust and ashes. No such denouement to the drama of faith took place in the camps. To the very end God remained silent and in hiding. Millions were looking for him—in vain. They had heard of Him by the hearing of the ear, but what was granted to their eyes to behold was 'dust and ashes,' into which they—and everything dear to them—were turned.

There were really two Jobs at Auschwitz: the one who belatedly accepted the advice of Job's wife and turned his back on God, and the other who kept his faith to the end, who affirmed it at the very doors of the gas chambers, who was able to walk to his death defiantly singing his '*Ami Maamin*—I believe.' If there were those whose faith was broken in the death camp, there were others who never wavered. If God was not present for many, He was not lost to many more. Those who rejected did so in authentic rebellion; those who affirmed and testified to the very end did so in authentic faith. Neither the authenticity of rebellion nor the authenticity of faith is available to those who are only Job's brother. The outsider, the brother of the martyrs, enters on a confusing heritage. He inherits both the rebellion and the witness of the martyrs: a rebellion not silenced by the witness; a witness not made void by the rebellion. In our generation, Job's brother, if he wishes to be true to his God-given heritage, 'reasons' with God in believing rebellion and rebellious belief. What is it then, he may hope for? He is not searching for an understanding, in terms of his faith, of what had befallen his people. He is not attempting to steal a glance at 'the hand' of the Almighty in order to be able to appreciate what meaning the senseless destruction of European Israel might have in the divine scheme. To understand is to justify, to accept. That he will not do... He desires to affirm, but not by behaving as if the holocaust had never happened. He knows that this generation must live and believe

in the shadow of the holocaust. He must learn how this is to be done. If his faith is to remain meaningful, he must make room for the impenetrable darkness of the death camps within his faith. The darkness will remain, but in its 'light' will he make his affirmations of faith, and it will accent his affirmations. The inexplicable will not be explained, yet it will become a positive influence in the formulation of that which is to be acknowledged. The sorrow will stay, but it will become blessed with the promise of another day for Israel to continue on its eternal course with a new dignity and a new self-assurance. Thus, perhaps in the awful misery of man will be revealed to us the awesome mystery of God. But when this happens, who can say that it will not be we who, seeking his consolation, in consoling Him shall find our comfort. (Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, New York, KTAV, 1973, 69-70)

Loyalty to God in the Face of Death

In a volume of Holocaust eyewitness testimonies published by the labour movement in Israel, the point is made that although the Jews in Europe knew well what had happened to many of their brethren, and what was awaiting them should they, too, be caught, many of them did not depart from their customary ways. In numerous places in the ghettos one could see through the windows Jews studying, or wearing *tallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries), praying the daily services in the midst of the required quorum of at least a *minyan* (ten men). On the High Holy Days they would put on the traditional *kittel* (white robe) and would pray with loud voices. Some of them even permitted themselves to walk in the streets clad in prayer shawls as if they were living in Jerusalem. It was as if Jews had ceased being afraid. (Eliezer Berkovits, *With God in Hell*, New York, Sanhedrin Press, 1979, 1)

References

1. Thomas J.J. Altizer, *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, New York, Bobbs-Merrill, 1966, 126

Discussion

1. Can one believe that God did not intervene on behalf of the Jewish people because he had granted humans free will?
2. Was God present at Auschwitz even though he was hidden?

Jonathan Sacks: Evil, Free Will and Jewish History

Jonathan Sacks has served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth. In Tradition in an Untraditional Age, he explains his earlier reluctance to explore the religious issues raised by the Holocaust. Yet, he insists that the questions raised by this tragedy must now be faced by contemporary Jewish writers. After discussing a range of interpretations, he draws on the theology of Eliezer Berkovits, arguing that the Holocaust was the result of human free will. In Sacks's view, the only lesson one can derive from the murder of six million Jews is that human beings are capable of horrendous acts. When human beings perpetrate evil, he writes, it is these individuals who are to blame, not God. Confronting the question how God can thus be known, Sacks asserts that there is no other witness that God is present in history but the history of the Jewish people.

Confronting the Holocaust

The holocaust is a mystery wrapped in silence. For almost twenty years afterwards, little was said, still less written about it. Like many others of the post-holocaust generation, I was reluctant to presume on so unfathomable a subject. The questions insist on being asked: How could one dare to speak? And how could one dare not to speak? The conflict is part of the continuing presence of the holocaust, so it is here that I begin.

First, I and others of my generation are too far away from that time. Which of us who were born after the holocaust, which of us who did not lose family in the holocaust can speak about the holocaust? . . . We are too far away to speak. But secondly, in an important sense we are also too close. Just as we now ask questions about the holocaust, so tradition tells us that we would ask questions about the exodus from Egypt and the events that preceded it. . . . We will not go far wrong if we say that the Biblical time-scale applies to the holocaust too: we should expect it to take forty years even to find the right question, let alone expect an answer. Third: just as we resist looking too long at the sun for fear of being blinded, we resist from looking too long at the blinding darkness of Auschwitz for fear of being driven to despair. . . .

These then are the three reasons why I and many others confronted by the holocaust, respond as did the Israelites at Sinai. . . . They saw and trembled and stayed at a distance. This feeling will govern what I have

The Hiddenness of God: Eliezer Berkovits

Human dignity and the death camps

Like Maza, Maybaum and Fackenheim, the Orthodox theologian Eliezer Berkovits in *Faith After the Holocaust* argues that religious belief is possible after the nightmare of the crematoria. In considering the theological dilemmas raised by the Holocaust, Berkovits maintains that the problem of faith must be confronted in the agony of one's soul. Whoever approaches the issue of Jewish suffering dispassionately, using the Holocaust as proof against God's existence, vulgarises the significance of the death camps. After the Holocaust Jews have religious responsibility to reason with God, and if need be to wrestle with Him. Such a stance is not blasphemous: it is simply impossible to pass by such horror in silence. Such a questioning of God stands out as a guidepost at the very beginning of Jewish history – Abraham wrestled with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Similarly, Job struggled with God over his misfortune. The attempt to understand God's providence in the death camps is thus consonant with the biblical tradition.

One way of resolving the crisis of faith engendered by the Jewish concentration camp experience is to meet the problem with a resolutely negative attitude. The declaration that there is neither justice nor judge is a Jewish version of radical theology. On this view, the universe is indifferent toward human destiny. Life is absurd, without meaning; the only values are those created by human beings. Such a view leaves no room for the transcendent. It is the very essence of this position that there is no personal God who is concerned with justice or human suffering. Yet after the Holocaust, meaning in the universe cannot be dismissed so simply.

At Auschwitz and Treblinka, man sank to the lowest level, but he was also exalted to the highest dignity. Many Jews faced death with heroism; as martyrs they affirmed their belief in God despite His terrible silence.

In the Warsaw ghetto, for example, Jews experienced the nobility of existence in the reign of terror. One of the survivors tells the story of how he and a woman were sought by the Gestapo. They were chased for weeks, living in the shadow of death. Finally they were trapped behind the accumulated garbage of a ghetto attic. As a policeman advanced, the man seized him by the throat but the Jewish woman ran from her hiding place and shouted: "Don't kill him. Don't kill him." According to Berkovits, this manifestation of human dignity in the face of the Nazi threat is an awe-inspiring testimony of the nobility of human life: "At that moment there was no place on earth holier than the dark and dusty corner in that attic in the Warsaw ghetto. It was the Holy of Holies on earth, sharing in the very majesty of Sinai, when God descended upon it and proclaimed His 'Thou shalt not kill'."

Another survivor reported, "I saw death many times in the ghetto and in the concentration camps, I looked into its eyes often. Yet always the way out would come suddenly as if by a miracle. Always a fellow-sufferer would appear to help out in a dangerous situation, by giving a hand."

Such cases of self-sacrifice were common, as is evidenced by a letter from a member of the Jewish Council of the Warsaw ghetto to a young woman who was his helper in the attempt to feed starving children. Because this individual was rich, he could have escaped from Poland but instead was determined to stay with his people. "I wish you a safe journey," he wrote. "I am not sorry that I remain here. Of all the decisions of a life which has not been a short one. . . I consider the one to stay here among my brothers and sisters the wisest."

Again, other Jews preserved their dignity by sanctifying God's name as they went to their deaths. Thousands of Jews proclaimed their love of God in the dark hour when it seemed as though He had abandoned them. In *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, Emmanuel Ringelbaum writes:

I marvel at the pious Jews who sacrifice themselves by wearing beards and the traditional frock coats. They are subjected to physical abuse. . . . An elderly Jew passed the guards on Twanda

Street and did not – for reasons of piety – take off his hat in salute though the Jewish guards warned him. So they tortured him a long time. An hour later, he acted in the same way.

Such determination to fulfil religious obligations in the face of degradation and misery is a manifestation of the value and meaning of human life. For Berkovits such acts confirm the transcendental meaning of existence.

Death of God theologians pass over the faith of these Jewish martyrs in silence, yet what such writers ignore is that in the death camps God was present with His holy people. As *El Misterio* – the Hidden God – He was manifest in their agony. Those Jews who died in the camps with God's name on their lips glimpsed His presence in their suffering. In the impenetrable darkness they remained firm in their faith in the living God. Jews today must model their response to the Holocaust on their example. Though the inexplicable cannot be explained, it can become a positive influence in the formulation of what is to be acknowledged. The sorrow will stay, but it can be blessed with the promise of God's faithfulness despite the miseries of this life.

The Hiding God

The history of the Jewish people has been continuously marred by disaster: the Temple was destroyed twice; the Jewish people were dispersed among the nations; Spanish Jewry was decimated; mass murder took place during the Crusades as well as at the time of the Black Death and during the Chmelnicki massacre. The problem of faith for the survivors of these catastrophes was no different from the issues that confront post-Holocaust Jewry. Although the horrors of the death camps surpassed anything that preceded it, the subjective impact of previous tragedies was no less intense. The Holocaust was unique only in the objective magnitude of its inhumanity – it was not singular as an obstacle to faith resulting from Jewish historical experience. The problem, Berkovits writes, is as old as Judaism itself.

A number of the sages of the Talmud attempted to resolve the dilemma of Jewish suffering by appealing to God's silence. In a discussion of the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, they quoted Psalm 89, "Who is a mighty one, like unto Thee, O

Eternal", interpreting this verse in accordance with Abba Hanan's explanation that God is mighty and strong since "He is able to listen to the tormentings and insults of the vile man and remain silent". In biblical terminology this concept of divine silence is expressed by the Hebrew phrase *Hester Panim* (the Hiding of the Face): when suffering occurs, God hides his face from human evil. Berkovits cites an example of *Hester Panim* in Psalm 44:

All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten Thee,
Neither have we been false to Thy covenant.
Our heart is not turned back,
Neither have our steps declined from Thy path;
Though thou hast crushed us into a place of jackals,
If we had forgotten the name of our God,
And covered us with the shadow of death,
Or spread forth our hands to a strange god;
Would not God search this out?
For He knoweth the secrets of the heart.
Nay, but for Thy sake are we killed all the day;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.
Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?
Arouse Thyself, cast not off for ever.
Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face,
And forgettest our affliction and our oppression?
For our soul is bowed down to the dust;
Our belly cleaveth to the earth.
Arise for our help,
And redeem us for Thy mercy's sake.

Here God is portrayed as distant from human tribulation – He hides Himself mysteriously from the cry of the innocent.

Through the centuries Jews struggled against God's seeming indifference to tragedy, yet rabbinic Judaism insisted that God is present in His silence. God's hiding His face is not due to divine indifference; rather His intention is to create space for human freedom. God did not will that one person be righteous and another evil – instead He created the possibility for each person to be a moral agent. As Berkovits writes: "He created evil by creating the possibility for evil; He made peace by creating the possibility for it. He had to create the possibility for evil, if He was to create the possibility for its opposite, peace, goodness, love." God is all-good, but