

## Theological Trends

# JEWISH HOLOCAUST THEOLOGY

By NORMAN SOLOMON

'HOLOCAUST' IS A THEOLOGICALLY LOADED WORD, borrowed from the vocabulary of sacrifice. Some prefer the biblical Hebrew term *Shoah* 'destruction' (Ps 35:8 and elsewhere), which is theologically neutral.

The Shoah was an act of mass murder, an attempted genocide.<sup>1</sup> The Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim lists five 'basic facts' about it which are in their combination unique:<sup>2</sup>

- One-third of the Jewish people was murdered, endangering Jewish survival as a whole.
- The plan was to 'exterminate' every Jewish man, woman or child.
- Jewish birth was in itself sufficient cause to merit torture and death.
- The 'Final Solution' was an end in itself, not a pragmatic project serving political power or economic greed.
- Most of the perpetrators were not pathological sadists or perverts, just ordinary jobholders led by 'idealists' whose ideals were torture and murder.

Fackenheim agonizes later over the studied and perverse manner in which the Nazis and those under their direction sought to humiliate, dehumanize, and induce self-disgust in Jews even before killing them.

The Shoah was unique in another aspect. The attitudes which enabled the Nazis to 'demonize' the Jews and thus carry out their programme were already deeply embedded in the popular cultures of the nations amongst whom they operated. For so long had Christians taught that Jews were a despised people, the rejecters and killers of Christ, obdurate in their adherence to a superseded faith, that European culture was saturated with this image of the Jew. It is surely unique that for little short of two thousand years one people has been singled out for constant and *religiously sanctioned* vilification through much of the 'civilized' world, Muslim as well as Christian.

Jews have suffered major tragedies before – the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the expulsion from Spain in 1492 – and these were accompanied by horrendous sufferings. Fackenheim writes (p 26):

The earlier catastrophes were great but not beyond belief and thus lived on in the memory of the generations until the time was ripe for a response. Our catastrophe, in contrast, is beyond belief and becomes ever more so with the passage of time.

Well, this is not quite true. It happened, it must and can be reflected upon. Fackenheim himself reflects upon it volubly. But the tendency to deny is

strong, and manifests itself not only in the fringe phenomenon of outright denial by 'revisionist' historians,<sup>3</sup> but in the tendency to assimilate the Shoah to general categories of tragedy and cruelty, 'losing' it as 'just an example' of something or other, denying its special character.

*Jewish Holocaust theology: traditional responses*

The Shoah confronts all human beings, of whatever faith. Alice Eckardt writes: 'At even deeper levels and in more radical ways the Holocaust is a *Christian* problem'.

The most characteristic expression of traditional Judaism is the *halakha*, or law. God, in his gracious compassion, granted us the Torah with its many commandments (*mitzvot*) so that we might learn from it to live according to his will.

The *halakha* of *Kiddush Hashem* is specially relevant to the problems faced by victims of the Shoah. Let us listen to the measured words in which Maimonides (1135/8–1204) sums up the tradition:

All the House of Israel are commanded to sanctify this Great Name (i.e. God), as it is written: 'I shall be sanctified amongst the people of Israel' (Lev 22:32). Likewise, they are commanded not to profane it, as it is written: 'Do not profane My holy name' (ibid). How is this fulfilled? If an idolater arises and forces a Jew to transgress any of the commandments of Torah under pain of death, he should transgress rather than be killed, for it is written of the commandments: 'that a man shall do and live by them' (Lev 18:5) – live by them, not die by them – if he die rather than transgress he is guilty of taking his own life.

In what circumstances does this apply? With regard to any of the commandments other than three, viz. idolatry, adultery/incest and the shedding of blood. With regard to these three, should he (the Jew) be ordered to commit them or face death he should die rather than transgress . . .

If the idolaters said to a group of women 'Hand over one of you and we will defile her or else we will defile all of you' they must not hand over even one Jewish life. Similarly, if the idolaters said (to a group of Jews) 'hand over one of you and we will kill him, or else we will kill all of you', they must not hand over even one Jewish life . . .<sup>4</sup>

It would be a romantic reconstruction of Shoah history to claim that all victims followed the ruling of Maimonides in these matters. The remarkable thing is not that some failed, whether out of weakness or ignorance or self-interest, but rather that so many succeeded in maintaining a high standard of moral integrity – in 'giving witness to God', as the religious express it – in these appalling circumstances.

In this sense, the *halakha* of *kiddush Hashem* was the everyday law of the Shoah. Sadly, confessing Christians acted the part of the 'idolaters' of whom that law speaks.

Rabbi Ephraim Oshry survived the Holocaust in the ghetto of Kovno, Lithuania. There, people approached him with their questions. He committed the questions and answers to writing on paper torn surreptitiously from cement sacks, and hid the writing in cans which miraculously survived the war.

The daily life of the ghetto, the food we ate, the crowded quarters we shared, the rags on our feet, the life in our skin, the relationships between men and women – all this was contained within the specifics of the questions . . .<sup>5</sup>

A glance at the range of subjects bears out how ordinary people in the ghetto, with the deep strength born of faith in God, were concerned quietly to walk in the precepts of God: 'Jews forced to shred a Torah scroll', 'Sabbath Torah reading for slave labourers', 'The blessing for martyrdom', 'Saving oneself with a baptismal certificate', 'Contraceptives in the ghetto', 'The repentant Kapo' – such headings rend the heart of the reader as the answers gave sacred meaning to the lives and deaths of the victims.

Yet of all the questions submitted by quite 'ordinary' people to Oshry and thousands of other rabbis of the Shoah period none are so agonizing as those involving harm to the life of other victims. The Nazis did their utmost to degrade and dehumanize Jews by forcing them to destroy each other. In substantial measure they failed. And that they failed is due in large part to the spirit engendered by the *halakha* on the sanctity of life.

Traditional interpretations of suffering depend not only on a strong sense of guilt, but also on the belief in life after death. This belief, whether expressed as bodily resurrection, eternal life of the spirit, or some combination, remains central in orthodox teaching.<sup>6</sup> The Kabbala adopts in addition the concept of the transmigration of souls. Such beliefs simplify the theology of suffering, for they diminish the significance of the vicissitudes of 'this world', and they provide an opportunity for 'compensation' for the evils of this world in the next. The transmigration of souls easily explains the suffering of innocent children – either they are being punished now for sins committed in a previous incarnation, or else they will get compensation for their present sufferings in a later one.

Fundamental to the traditional Jewish understanding of suffering is the distinction between *hashgacha peratit* and *hashgacha kelalit* – individual and general (collective) Providence. In terms of general Providence the Shoah can be 'understood', for it is not hard to rationalize the destruction of part of the people of Israel as part of God's redemptive process, leading ultimately to Israel's restoration, whether or not in terms of the Land. It is the individual Providence which is most problematic. Since everything is subject to God's will, it is legitimate to ask not just why the people of Israel suffered, but why each individual suffered. If spiritual excellence is something we can recognize at all, it certainly characterized many of those who perished.

Elchanan Wasserman (1875–1941) was one of the leading rabbis of the pre-war generation. His writings, speeches, life and martyrdom offer a paradigm of the orthodox theology of suffering. Wasserman visited the United States in 1938, and was there when the news of *Kristallnacht* arrived. He was dismayed by the lack of Torah learning and observance amongst the Jews he met in America, and there he completed, in Yiddish, his booklet *Iqvata-diMeshicha*, 'In the footsteps of the Messiah',<sup>7</sup> in which he predicts that dire destruction will come upon the Jewish people on account of its lack of faith and its laxity in the observance of God's commandments. Gershon Greenberg, in a perceptive paper on Wasserman and his brother-in-law Chayyim Ozar Grodzinski of Vilna, has summed up their views as:

... for Achiezer [Grodzinski], Reform [of the authentic revealed tradition] is responsible. It, along with the suffering it evokes, is now pressing eastward. The response must be education to engender faith and Torah. Wasserman blames religious and cultural assimilation; nationalism as an act of normalization and defiance of religion and God; and denunciation of Torah. The response called for is the same for both leaders. For Achiezer, Torah and faith are means to endure the suffering, to turn the catastrophe back, and to bring redemption. Wasserman believes the catastrophe is the birth pain of the Messiah ... man's role is to turn to God through Torah.

Similar views are nowadays commonplace in orthodox writing, and have even received popular expression, as in Benjamin Maza's *With God's fury poured out* (New York: KTAV, 1984). To understand the rabbis who spoke and even now speak in this way it is necessary to know how deeply they felt the gulf between the ideal demanded by Torah and the reality of modern secular civilization.

'It is clear beyond all doubt that the blessed Holy One is the ruler of the universe, and we must accept the judgment with love . . .' These words of the Hungarian Rabbi Shmuel David Ungar<sup>8</sup> exactly express the simple faith of those who entered the gas chambers with *Ani Ma'amin* (the declaration of faith as formulated by Maimonides) or *Shema Israel* (Deut 6:4–9, declaring God's unity and the duty to love him and obey his commandments – it is read daily at the morning and evening services and forms part of the deathbed confession) on their lips. What was happening defied their understanding, but their faith triumphed over evil and they were ready, in the traditional phrase, to 'sanctify the name of God' – *kiddush Hashem*. Hence it is normal amongst Jews to refer to those who perished under the Nazis as *kedoshim*, 'holy ones, saints'.

The concept of 'dying for *kiddush Hashem*' is analogous to that of martyrdom. It is applied to those killed because of their faith even where they had no choice. Its use is extended to those killed not because of their faith but, as in the Shoah, because of their 'race'. We erect memorials to the 'six million

martyrs'; but although the emotion is understandable the theology is precarious.

Has not God acted *unjustly* towards Israel? Israel has indeed sinned, but surely others, not least Israel's oppressors, have sinned more? The traditional reply to this is that of Amos, that it is precisely God's love for Israel that leads him to chastise them more than any other nation – 'For you alone have I cared among all the nations of the world; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities' (Amos 3:2, NEB translation).

Suffering is thus received as a token of God's special concern for Israel.

The sense of apocalyptic, of being part of the events heralding the Messiah and the final redemption of Israel and the world, was strong amongst the orthodox victims of the Shoah. Precisely the same concept was being developed, before and independently of the Holocaust, by Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Palestine in modern times, for he understood the return to Zion as *atchala di-geulta*, the beginning of redemption.<sup>9</sup> The further step, taken by many religious Zionists, has been to interpret both the Shoah and the strife surrounding the emergence of the state of Israel as 'birth pangs' of the Messiah.

*Kiddush Hashem* is a demonstration of faith which leads those who witness or hear about it towards God. This shades into redemptive suffering and the vicarious atonement for sin.

Here is Oshry's eye-witness account of Wasserman's response as he was seized to be taken to his death in July, 1941:

Reb Elchonon spoke in a quiet and relaxed manner as always . . . the same earnest expression on his face . . . he addressed all Jews:

'It seems that in Heaven we are regarded as *tzadikim*,<sup>10</sup> for we are being asked to atone with our own bodies for the sins of Israel. Now we really must do *teshuva* (repent) in such a manner – for the time is short and we are not far from the ninth fort<sup>11</sup> – we must have in mind that we will be better sacrifices if we do *teshuva*, and we may (?save?) our American brothers and sisters.

'God forbid that anyone should allow any improper thought to enter his head, for the *korban* (sacrifice) is invalidated by improper thought. We are about to fulfil the greatest *mitzva* of all – "with fire You destroyed it, with fire You will rebuild it"<sup>12</sup> – the fire which destroys our bodies is the selfsame fire which will restore the Jewish people.'

Implicit in Oshry's account is the notion of vicarious atonement. Although Jewish apologetics has tended to minimize the role of vicarious atonement in Jewish theology, Wasserman was perfectly in accord with a continuous tradition running from the biblical understanding of animal sacrifice through such rabbinic concepts as the death of the righteous atoning for the 'sin of the generation' to the hyperbole attributed to the second-century Simon bar Yohai that 'I could exempt the whole world from judgment since the time I was born,

and were my son Eleazar to join with me, from the day the world was created until now'.<sup>13</sup> The theme is widely echoed in medieval Hebrew liturgical poetry.<sup>14</sup>

The idea of God being 'hidden' – *deus absconditus* – features strongly, perhaps because of its full development by the mystics (kabbalists). It seems contrary to the common midrashic idea of God, or the *Shekhina* (divine presence), being 'in exile' with Israel, for 'I am with him in his distress' (Ps 91:15). Psalm 44 is more explicit, agonized, on the subject of hiddenness.

Martin Buber asks: 'How is a life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Auschwitz? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness too deep.'<sup>15</sup> Eliezer Berkovitz, espousing the notion of the 'hidden face of God',<sup>16</sup> is in accord with tradition when he not merely finds the hiddenness of God compatible with God's existence, but discovers actual presence within his silence.

On the other hand, there seems little echo of the idea espoused by Maimonides<sup>17</sup> that evil is merely the absence of good. This may be because the Holocaust gives such a strong sense of the *reality* of evil that any doctrine asserting its non-reality is self-evidently false.

Hannah Arendt, a secular Jewess, came close to the doctrine of *privatio boni* when she argued that only the good has depth, whereas even the most extreme evil is superficial and banal.<sup>18</sup> Barry Clarke rightly rejected Arendt's characterization of Eichmann's activities in organizing transport to the gas chambers as 'banal'. Organizing transportation may indeed be 'banal', in contrast with 'radical evil' as understood by Kant. However, the concept of freedom of the will means that 'Eichmann surrendered only his autonomy and not his spontaneity and at each moment of time he could presumably have resumed exercising his judgment and reason and used his freedom of will to recommence choosing for himself'.<sup>19</sup>

#### *The critique of traditional responses*

Judaism teaches that God shapes history, on occasion actually intervening even for the sake of individuals. But, as Irving Greenberg has put it:

The Holocaust poses the most radical counter-testimony to both Judaism and Christianity . . . The cruelty and the killing raise the question whether even those who believe after such an event dare to talk about God who loves and cares without making a mockery of those who suffered.<sup>20</sup>

Richard Rubenstein<sup>21</sup> is driven by reflection on the Shoah to reject the traditional idea of God as the 'Lord of history'. God simply failed to intervene to save his faithful. Though denying atheism, he urges both Christians and Jews to adopt non-theistic forms of religion, based on pagan or Asian models, and finds deep spiritual resources within the symbolism of Temple sacrifice.

Rubenstein and others of similar outlook are determined to maintain Jewish identity – in this case a *religious* identity – even if not based, as it was in the

past, on theistic faith. Other Jews would express their identity in secular terms, including the secular forms of Zionism, or simply in social terms.

Elie Wiesel, in his heart-rending reminiscences and stories of the Shoah, enabled people to talk about it, to enter, so to speak, into its 'social and cultural context'.<sup>22</sup> He imposes no systematic structure or interpretation on the reality he places before us, but rather creates a new myth through which the reader or hearer absorbs the meaning that cannot be said. His stories comprise a 'narrative exegesis' of the Shoah.

Theologians will see in many of Wiesel's stories paradigms of suffering leading to salvation. This is a common enough Jewish concept from Exodus onwards, but Wiesel's closeness to Christian expressions of the theology of suffering verges on the substitution of the six million for Christ on the cross.<sup>23</sup>

Liturgy is the religious means of conveying that for which words are insufficient. Marcia Littell<sup>24</sup> is amongst those responsible for the development of Holocaust liturgies for use by Christians, Jews or both together, and these have achieved widespread use particularly in North America. *Yom Hashoah* (Holocaust Memorial Day), which often attracts joint Christian and Jewish participation, is so far observed by only a minority of Jews, as some prefer to assimilate remembrance of the Holocaust to the existing fast of 10th Tevet or that of 9th Ab.<sup>25</sup>

The psychiatrist Viktor Frankl developed his 'logotherapy' as a victim in Auschwitz and Dachau, and left a profoundly moving account of how he discovered meaning and 'supra-meaning' precisely there, where the oppressor aimed to deprive the life of the Jew of all meaning and value. Those who were unable to achieve the 'will to meaning' soon perished, Frankl observed; those who could somehow find meaning survived wherever survival was physically possible.<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, in religious terms, Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum declared in the Warsaw ghetto at the time of the uprising:

This is a time for *kiddush-ha-hayyim*, the sanctification of life, and not for *kiddush ha-Shem*, the holiness of martyrdom. Previously the Jew's enemy sought his soul and the Jew sanctified his body in martyrdom [i.e., he made a point of preserving what the enemy wished to take from him]; now the oppressor demands the Jew's body, and the Jew is obliged therefore to defend it, to preserve his life.<sup>27</sup>

There is an aesthetic version of *kiddush-ha-hayyim* also. Much of the visual art produced in the appalling hell of the concentration camps has been rescued, exhibited, published. But what of music? Could the 'songs of the Lord' be sung in that dark land (Ps 137)? Indeed yes. At Theresienstadt, where Jews of Czechoslovakia were interned prior to being exterminated in Auschwitz, orchestras were formed, operas staged, the composers wrote and the singers sang. This was truly *kiddush ha-hayyim*, to assert the beauty (for beauty is a category of holiness) of life in the face of so much suffering.<sup>28</sup>

Fackenheim grounds his own Holocaust theology in the actual resistance of Shoah victims to whom no realistic hope remained.<sup>29</sup> 'A philosophical *Tikkun*<sup>30</sup> is possible after the Holocaust because a philosophical *Tikkun* already took place, however fragmentarily, during the Holocaust itself.'<sup>31</sup>

Before writing *To mend the world* Fackenheim had achieved note for his statement that there should be a 614th commandment – to survive as Jews, to remember, never to despair of God, lest we hand Hitler a posthumous victory.<sup>32</sup> What one discerns in his evolving position is, at least, an affirmation of life and of God, and a challenge to Christian, Jew and all humankind to 'mend the world'. For Fackenheim, Israel (the Jewish state) is the central affirmation of Jewish survival, central in the world process of *Tikkun*; hence he has now made his home there.

Dr Gerhart Riegner, in the office of the World Jewish Congress in Geneva in 1942, had the task of relaying to a disbelieving world the news of the 'Final Solution'. Since then, he has devoted his life to the furtherance of international Jewish-Christian dialogue. I once asked him how it was that his experience in 1942 had not embittered him, had not made him turn away from the 'nations of the world' who had been unwilling to help Israel in her hour of need. His answer was illuminating. 'It was then that I decided that my task in life was to end the isolation of Jewish people.' Though the response of many – Berkovitz for example – has been to declare that dialogue with a Church which failed to warn its followers away from Hitler is simply not possible, Riegner and others have determined otherwise.

*Beyond survival* is the title of an important book by Dow Marmor, who expresses the feeling not only of Reform Jews like himself but of many others that the 'imperative to survival,' which is the end result of Holocaust theology such as that of Fackenheim, is a hollow call. Survival is not an end in itself, nor is the proving wrong of Hitler an adequate goal for life in general. One has to ask, 'survival for what?'

Irving Greenberg divides the history of Judaism into three eras. The first extended from Sinai to the destruction of the Second Temple. The second, the rabbinic period, characterized by powerlessness and by the 'hiddenness' of God but at the same time by a deep faith in the covenant and redemption, extended from 70 CE until the Shoah. The Shoah shattered the naïve faith in the covenant of redemption, inaugurating a third era the shape of which is determined by our response to the crisis of faith. Greenberg insists that this response must involve *all* Jews, not merely those who share his orthodox commitment. Auschwitz was 'a call to humans to stop the Holocaust, a call to the people Israel to rise to a new, unprecedented level of covenantal responsibility . . . Even as God was in Treblinka, so God went up with Israel to Jerusalem.' Jews today, in Israel and elsewhere, have a special responsibility, in fidelity to those who perished, to work for the abolition of that matrix of values that supported genocide.<sup>33</sup>

So, for Greenberg, post-Holocaust Jewish philosophy has to be formulated in terms of empowerment – now that Jews have 'taken on power and



responsibility to act', how will they use that power? It is but a small step from this (a step Greenberg has resisted) to espousing some form of Jewish 'liberation theology', and the step has been taken by Dan Cohn-Sherbok<sup>34</sup> and Marc Ellis.<sup>35</sup>

*Does the Shoah require a radically new theology?*

Let us concede that the Shoah is *historically* unique. Is it *theologically* unique?

Consider Irving Greenberg's striking statement that, after the Shoah, 'no statement theological or otherwise should be made that could not be made in the presence of burning children' – or Kierkegaard's remark that a single event of inexplicable horror 'has the power to make everything inexplicable, including the most explicable events'. Then reflect somberly that children were burned long before the Shoah and continue to be burned, and people, many of them undoubtedly innocent, were crucified long before Jesus and frequently afterwards.

Both Judaism and Christianity developed at least partly in response to horrible experiences, and in the awareness that such horrible experiences were likely to be the lot of humankind until some transforming event (Messiah, kingdom of God on earth) would come about. Therefore, they both have a 'theology of suffering', an attempt to 'assert Eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men'.<sup>36</sup> Deuteronomy presupposes a direct relationship between sin and suffering, obedience and prosperity; Psalms, Job and Ecclesiastes try to come to terms with the presence of suffering and injustice in the world.

Holocaust theologians insist that the Shoah was not only quantitatively, but qualitatively, different from previous suffering. It introduced a *novum* (Fackenheim), a *tremendum* (Arthur A. Cohen),<sup>37</sup> which invalidates previous responses to suffering. It is as if God has abandoned his covenant, even, as David R. Blumenthal has recently dared to argue, as if our 'Father in heaven' has treated us like an abusing parent.<sup>38</sup>

Certainly, it is more horrible for a million to perish than for one to perish, and it is more horrible to be subjected to humiliation and killed than to be killed without humiliation. Also, some of the traditional 'answers' are harder to apply to large numbers than small; for instance, if a mere handful of righteous people suffer apparent injustice we can easily convince ourselves that despite all appearances they were not really righteous, whereas if millions suffer it becomes much less reasonable to suggest that *all* of them were really evil. But this is an effect of quantity, not of quality. *If* we could know that an individual was really righteous (as, for instance, Scripture assures us in the case of Job), then the dodge of saying 'perhaps appearances were deceptive' cannot be used, any more than it can where the numbers involved are so great that it would be absurd to maintain that none of the sufferers was righteous.

So, even though the Shoah was in significant ways dissimilar from other historical events, it does not appear to have posed radically new questions for

theology. The questions were there all the time. The Shoah has focused our attention on them as never before, but they are the same questions.

To a surprising degree the answers given by the Holocaust theologians are *the same answers* as those to be found in earlier traditional sources. Many of them – those we have described under the headings of narrative exegesis, liturgy, the assertion of meaning and value, the imperative of survival, and *tikkun* – are varieties of one of those answers, that of redemption through suffering, worked out with new insights arising from modern psychological and sociological perspectives and applied, often with great sensitivity, to the present situation of the Jewish people.

If the Shoah does not of itself demand a new theology, and the demands for new theologies made by post-Shoah theologians do not result in anything really new, why have so many of them felt impelled to distance themselves from traditional Jewish theologies of suffering? There are two reasons.

First, the traditional theologies of suffering *never were satisfactory*. In the words of the second-century rabbi Yannai: 'It is not in our power to explain either the prosperity of the wicked or the afflictions of the righteous' (Mishna, *Avot* 4:19). Yannai's words did not stop rabbis in his own or later generations speculating on the problem of evil. Indeed, though none of the answers is satisfactory they may all *contribute*, if only a little, to the upholding of faith in the face of evil.

Second, the traditional interpretations of suffering depend heavily for such cogency as they may have on the belief in life after death and/or the transmigration of souls. Equally, they depend upon a belief in the inerrancy of Scripture and in the authenticity of its rabbinic interpretation. These beliefs have been under attack in modern times for reasons which have *nothing to do with* the Shoah. Modern biblical studies undermine the traditional type of scriptural belief and demand a new kind of attitude to the authority of the Bible; modern intellectual developments such as the radical questioning of Cartesian dualism have placed new strains on the concept of life after death.

The Shoah came at a time when theology was already in a greater ferment than ever before in its history. This is why, unlike earlier tragedies such as the expulsion from Spain, the Shoah led many to the abandonment of traditional modes of response to suffering.

It is dangerously misleading for Holocaust theologians to base their challenge to traditional beliefs on the fact of the Shoah. The serious intellectual issues of faith in the modern world thereby become submerged in a deep emotional trauma which prevents their being directly faced. The agenda for Jewish theologians ought to comprise not only the broad social issues which confront theologians of all faiths in contemporary society, but also the intellectual problems which lie at the root of theistic, revelation-based faith. It would be superficial to ignore the Shoah in these contexts, but to centralize it distorts the very framework of the Jewish faith.

Notwithstanding a long and continuous tradition, from the Bible onwards, of theology of suffering, and notwithstanding a history of martyrdom second

to none, the focus of Jewish theology has consistently been not suffering, but God and God's commandments. There is no reason for this to change even after the Shoah.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The word 'genocide' was coined only in the 1940s, with specific reference to the Holocaust. But it is a general term, and cannot be withheld from any other event it fits.

<sup>2</sup> Emil L. Fackenheim, *To mend the world: foundations of future Jewish thought* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 12. Others have produced more subtle analyses of the relationship of the Holocaust to other persecutions and genocides. Amongst those given at the Oxford Conference and appearing in *Holocaust and genocide studies* are Steven J. Katz' 'Quantity and interpretation – issues in the comparative historical analysis of the Holocaust', *HGC* vol 4, no 2 (1989), Frank Chalk's 'Revolutionary genocide' in the same volume, and Henry Huttenbach's 'Locating the Holocaust on the genocide spectrum' in *HGC* vol 3, no 3 (1988). See also Steven J. Katz, 'Defining the uniqueness of the Holocaust' in Dan Cohn-Sherbok (ed), *A traditional quest: essays in honour of Louis Jacobs* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), pp 42–57.

<sup>3</sup> See Gill Seidel, *The Holocaust denial* (Leeds: Beyond the Pale Collective, 1986), for an analysis of the phenomenon of right-wing Holocaust denial.

<sup>4</sup> Moses Maimonides (1135/8–1204), *Mishneh Torah Hilkhoh Yesodey Ha-Torah*, chapter 5. From BT *Sanhedrin* 74 it appears that formal codification originated at the rabbinical council in Lud (Lydda) in the second century. BT *Pesahim* 53b refers to Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in Daniel 3 as prototypes for *kiddush Hashem*, and of course the examples of Eleazar and of Hannah and her seven sons (2 Maccabees 6 and 7) were well known to the rabbis. Fourth Maccabees develops the concept even further.

<sup>5</sup> Ephraim Oshry, *Responsa from the Holocaust*, translated into English by Y. Leiman (New York: Judaica Press, 1983), p. ix.

<sup>6</sup> In the second century the Mishnah already regarded the rejection of belief in life after death as heresy (Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 10:1). On the problem of evil in Jewish thought see Oliver Leaman, *Evil and suffering in Jewish philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> English versions include David Cooper's translation, *The epoch of the Messiah*, published by Hachinuch publishers in London in 1964.

<sup>8</sup> Cited on pp 98–99 of Robert Kirschner, *Rabbinic responsa of the Holocaust era* (New York: Schocken, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> See Bokser, Ben Zion, *Abraham Isaac Kook* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978) for an English translation of some of Kook's smaller works.

<sup>10</sup> 'Righteous'. He is not boasting, but expressing mild surprise at the divine compliment of having been selected for a sacred task.

<sup>11</sup> The place where the Jews of Slobodka (Kovno) were murdered.

<sup>12</sup> This phrase occurs in the liturgy for the Ninth of Ab and is reminiscent of Lamentations 4:11.

<sup>13</sup> BT *Sukkah* 45b. Note the carefully chosen term attributed to Simon: *liftor* (exempt) not *lig'ol* (redeem).

<sup>14</sup> As the literature on this is vast let it suffice to mention Ephraim of Bonn's poem *Et avotay ani mazkir*, conveniently available with translation in the *Penguin book of Hebrew verse* (Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 379. See also Shalom Spiegel's *The last trial* (New York: Behrman House, 1979).

<sup>15</sup> 'The dialogue between heaven and earth', a lecture first delivered in 1951.

<sup>16</sup> Eliezer Berkovitz, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1973).

<sup>17</sup> For instance, in *Guide of the perplexed*, 3:10–12. The idea of evil as *privatio boni* is generally traced back to pseudo-Dionysius, and is represented in Christian tradition from Augustine onwards.

- <sup>18</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a report on the banality of evil* (New York: The Viking Press, 1963).
- <sup>19</sup> Barry Clarke, 'Beyond the banality of evil' in *British Journal of Political Science* vol 10, pp 417-439.
- <sup>20</sup> Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of smoke, pillar of fire' in Eva Fleischner (ed), *Auschwitz: beginning of a new era?* (New York: KTAV, 1977).
- <sup>21</sup> Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: radical theology and contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).
- <sup>22</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger has written: 'A narrative exegesis does not divorce the theological element from its cultural and social base, but has to argue its theology in its involvement, in its function, in these other fields of conflict', *Conflict in Corinth* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), p 66.
- <sup>23</sup> I have in mind the story in Wiesel's *The gates of the forest* (New York: Avon, 1967), pp 9-12. The same thought is explored in the Christian Franklin H. Littell's work, *The crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). See also Ziva Amishai-Maisels' paper 'Christological symbolism of the Holocaust' in *Holocaust and genocide studies* vol 3, no 4 (1988), pp 457 onwards.
- <sup>24</sup> Marcia Sachs Littell (ed), *Liturgies on the Holocaust: an interfaith anthology* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986). A revised edition, edited by Littell together with Sharon Weissman Gutman, was published under the same title by Trinity Press International (Philadelphia, 1996).
- <sup>25</sup> Fackenheim, *op. cit.*, pp 310f. challenges this view. But former Chief Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits, in his paper 'Religious responses to the Holocaust', published by the Chief Rabbi's Office, London, in 1987, argued strongly against the introduction of new fast days.
- <sup>26</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's search for meaning* (New York: Touchstone Books, Simon and Schuster, 1959), and subsequent editions. First published in German under the title *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager*.
- <sup>27</sup> Fackenheim, *op. cit.*, from Shaul Esh, 'The dignity of the destroyed' in *The catastrophe of European Jewry*, eds Y. Gutman and L. Rothkirchen (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976), p 355.
- <sup>28</sup> See Joza Karas, *Music in Terezin: 1941-1945* (New York: Beaufort Books, 1985), p 197, and Josef Bor's novel *The Terezin requiem* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963). In the Warsaw ghetto, an orchestra gave concerts under the baton of Szymon Pullmann (Simon Pulver).
- <sup>29</sup> Fackenheim, *op. cit.*, especially IV:8-12.
- <sup>30</sup> This Hebrew word for mending or restoration is an important term for Fackenheim, and his usage owes something to the Lurianic kabbala. I expect he wishes to avoid anything that sounds like 'salvation'.
- <sup>31</sup> p 266.
- <sup>32</sup> Fackenheim in *Judaism* 16 (Summer 1967), pp 272-273. The earliest attribution of the popular tradition that the Torah contained 613 commandments is to the third-century rabbi Simlai, in the Babylonian Talmud (*Makkot* 23b).
- <sup>33</sup> Irving Greenberg, 'On the third era in Jewish history: power and politics' in *Perspectives* (New York, 1980). See also his 1981 article in the same journal.
- <sup>34</sup> Cohn-Sherbok's article, 'Jews, Christians and liberation theology', appeared in the London-based journal *Christian Jewish Relations* vol 17, no 1 (March 1984). His book *On earth as it is in heaven* was published by Orbis Books (Maryknoll, New York, 1987), shortly before Ellis's work.
- <sup>35</sup> Marc H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish liberation theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1987). See his contribution and the discussion in the dedicated issue of *Christian Jewish Relations* on the Jewish-Christian dialogue and liberation theology (London, Spring 1988).
- <sup>36</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost* I, 6-7. Leibniz' *Theodicy* addresses an age-old problem.
- <sup>37</sup> Arthur A. Cohen, *The tremendum: a theological interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).
- <sup>38</sup> David J. Blumenthal, *Facing the abusing God* (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993).