

Speaking Truth after the Shoah: Jewish Post-Holocaust Theologies and Multireligious Conversation

By Daniel Langton

Introduction

Religious reflections on the Shoah play a role in multireligious conversation, but almost exclusively in the realm of Jewish-Christian dialogue. Many of the issues raised in this context are also relevant to other religious encounters, such as those of Jewish and Muslim relations, but it is only in Jewish-Christian dialogue that the issues have been explored in any real depth and for any real length of time.

Today, modern Jewish-Christian dialogue involves many contentious issues among which are questions about the nature of Christian anti-Judaism and its role in the Shoah, about the construction of images of the Other in tradition and culture, about how to approach problematic scriptures, and about the Israel-Palestine conflict. There are broader questions, too, about whether Jews and Christians can work together on matters of social justice, debates about Church and State, and the science and religion culture wars. And there are pressing, pragmatic questions about how to bridge the gap between elite and popular inter-religious relations, and about whether Jewish-Christian-Muslim triologue makes more sense now than Jewish-Christian dialogue. Jewish post-Holocaust theologies have something to contribute to many, although by no means all, of these subjects.

In what follows we will first survey some of the ideas and trends found within Jewish post-holocaust theology before considering how such theologies relate to interfaith dialogue more generally.¹ The Jewish religious responses included here date from 1965 until 2003, and come mostly from the U.S. and northern Europe.² In order to establish what exactly constitutes interfaith dialogue for our purposes we will draw upon the only significant Jewish collective contribution to interreligious dialogue to date, that is, a statement published in 2002 entitled *Dabru Emet*. This document sets out eight key Jewish concerns for furthering Jewish-Christian relations. By comparing these with the post-Holocaust theologies, it should become apparent what Jewish religious responses to the Shoah have to contribute to contemporary interreligious conversation, at least from the Jewish side of the things.

Overview of Jewish Post-Holocaust Theologies

The received canon of Holocaust Theology begins with a work that remains as profoundly unnerving a read today as when it was published in 1965. **Ignaz Maybaum's** *The Face of God After Auschwitz*, a collection of short essays and sermons first delivered in 1963, was the Austrian-born British Reform rabbi's attempt to answer the single question that had obsessed him since 1933: What had happened?³ Behind this apparently naïve question was the issue of whether belief in God's providential power and the idea of divine redemption were any longer meaningful. Ultimately, Maybaum argued in the affirmative, for he explained the Nazi genocide as an act of God that had brought about a greater good. Jewish suffering, he argued, should be understood as a historical manifestation of the mission of Israel, to bring about spiritual progress for Judaism and for the wider world. He pointed to a pattern of Jewish disasters, specifically, the destruction of the two Temples, as historical proofs of this claim. The first had led to the recognition that the Jewish people constituted a nation independent of a

land, and their consequent exile had resulted in carrying the knowledge of the true God and His Torah to the Gentile world. The second had ended the Jewish Temple cult, replacing it with prayer and study, and had demonstrated to the nations that the universal God was not located in any one place and did not require blood sacrifice. The Holocaust fitted into this pattern as the third *churban* or destruction. Hitler had, like Nebuchadnezzar before him, been an instrument of the divine will,⁴ but he had also symbolized what was wrong with mankind. After Hitler's war against the Jews, the world, which had been led into the idolatrous worship of technology and a false messiah that made possible such barbarism, would never again trust in the empty promises of authoritarianism, whether theocratic or scientific, nor would it any longer tolerate religious persecution.⁵ The destruction of European Jewry could also be regarded positively as ridding Judaism of the pernicious influence of medieval Jewish attitudes towards the Law and tradition.⁶

Few since have dared to offer such a redemptive theological assessment of the Shoah, especially after the publication of the collection of essays entitled *After Auschwitz* (1966) by the North American free-thinker and Conservative-trained rabbi **Richard Rubenstein**. Rubenstein set the agenda by challenging any attempt to reconcile the God of the Exodus story, who saved His People from slavery, with the facts of the Holocaust. Traditional explanations for the problem of evil that attempted to justify God's ways in the context of 'the most demonic anti-human explosion of all history'⁷ were morally repugnant and theologically bankrupt. This realization, he said, had profound consequences for Judaism itself, and he famously proclaimed the death of the God of (Jewish) tradition, maintaining that a radical reformulation of Jewish religion was called for.⁸ Rubenstein's Jewish contribution to the Death of God movement⁹ has become the classic work of anti-theodicy and revisionism with which all later Holocaust Theologies have had to grapple. In it he argued that while the omnipotent, redemptive God of Judaism was dead and the Jewish people stood in 'a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power',¹⁰ the need for a viable Jewish community was more vital than ever. What alternative to Jewish religious tradition could he propose? His initial suggestion of a concoction of Freudian-influenced nature-paganism and Zionism, which drew criticism as a kind of Jewish atheism, later gave way to a mystical vision of Judaism with an impersonal, transcendent conception of the divine that had little or no bearing on the sufferings of the real world.¹¹ While in the early years Rubenstein's provocative ideas did not impress North American Jewry, and he soon found himself socially and institutionally ostracized, the seriousness with which he took the religious challenges of the Holocaust has come to be vindicated within both communal and scholarly circles.

The philosopher **Hans Jonas** shared certain assumptions with Rubenstein, not least a conception of God as transcendent and incapable of acting directly upon the world. His essay, 'The Concept of God After Auschwitz' (1968), which was revised several times, approaches the Holocaust somewhat tangentially, in that Jonas' first concern was to consider the nature of God's interaction with His creation. He envisions a God who, in the beginning and for unknowable reasons, had committed Himself to a cosmic experiment in 'chance and risk and [the] endless variety of becoming'.¹² This He had done by establishing the physical and biological laws that unfolded over time and space without any divine direction or correction and without foreknowledge of how it would develop.¹³ The universe was left to itself to play out according to natural law and chance, with God having withdrawn Himself completely from the process. Following the surprising emergence of life, blind evolutionary forces had eventually generated the human mind which was capable of moral choice and of changing the world. With man, God now had a partner in creation.¹⁴ From this new myth there followed some interesting theological implications for any understanding of the divine. This included the idea of a 'becoming God' who is profoundly affected by His creation,¹⁵ and of a suffering God, who is disappointed and hurt by His creation.¹⁶ Such a God confounds the traditional claim of omnipotence, for the

authentic act of creation must entail the self-renunciation of the creator's power; if God was to intervene, He would be tampering with the process of free development such that creation would not be truly free of and distinct from the creator. Thus, while He remains in close relation with and cares for His creation, God has devolved responsibility for the creative process to humankind.¹⁷ By the time Jonas arrives at a consideration of the Holocaust, he is able to explain God's silence at Auschwitz as the necessary consequence of the relation of the creator to His creation: 'I entertain the idea of a God who for a time – the time of the ongoing world process – has divested Himself of any power to interfere with the physical course of things'.¹⁸ This means that the responsibility for the victimization of 'the gassed and burnt children of Auschwitz' cannot lie with God but rather with humankind. Jonas appears to recognize that his theological speculation on such suffering and on 'a hidden God' strays somewhat from Jewish tradition.¹⁹ In an attempt to rectify this perception, he suggests that it is not as foreign to Judaism as it first appears, observing the similarity of his theology with 'the old Jewish idea' within the mystical tradition of *tzimtzum* or 'contraction of the divine being as the condition for the being of a world.'²⁰

This interest in *kabbalah* is given a more significant place in the thought of another philosopher, **Emil Fackenheim**, a German-born Canadian Reform rabbi who survived incarceration at Sachsenhausen, and who offers perhaps the most sustained and rigorous response to the theological challenges of the Shoah. Central to his writings is the idea that the Holocaust, as an event, cannot be adequately explained. In *God's Presence in History* (1970) he suggested that, uniquely, it could be categorized as both an 'epoch-making event' of Jewish history, comparable to the end of prophecy and the destruction of the temples, which challenged the core beliefs of Judaism, *and* as a 'root experience' of Jewish tradition, corresponding to foundational, revelational events such as the Exodus and the giving of the Law at Sinai, which established those core beliefs. Increasingly, he came to view the Holocaust as profoundly mysterious. In *The Jewish Return to History* (1978) he described it as 'the rock on which throughout all eternity all rational explanations will crash and break apart.'²¹ Consequently, he refused to engage with explorations of its religious meaning and focused instead on the authentic response of the Jew in its aftermath. For Fackenheim, the starting point was the surprise of Jewish continuity. In highly charged language, he claimed that the wider Jewish community's astonishing determination to continue to self-identify as Jews could be understood as obedience, whether conscious or otherwise, to a new divine commandment: 'Thou shalt not give Hitler a posthumous victory'. This 614th commandment involved acts of social justice and resistance, as he argued in *To Mend the World* (1982). The title itself indicates his indebtedness to the Jewish mystical conception of *tikkun* or mending, that is, the idea that the Godhead was broken and needed to be restored to itself, which could be achieved by observance of the *mitzvot* or commandments among other things. The idea could also be expressed in terms of God being in exile from Himself, and Fackenheim linked it to a fierce affirmation of Jewish political autonomy and self-preservation, best achieved through Zionism and the support of the State of Israel. Via a Jewish mystical motif, then, the moral authority of Jewish philosopher-survivor was married to the religious politics of the nation state.

This kind of theologically-informed commitment to Israel is prominent in the work of the Transylvanian-born Orthodox rabbi **Eliezer Berkovits**, too. Also fascinated with the question of how the Holocaust might reveal the ways in which God acts in history, he was particularly interested in its relation to the establishment of the world's only Jewish state after two millennia. The miracle of 1948 demonstrated that the God of Jewish tradition continued to intervene in human affairs; in the words of the deuteronomic blessing, His face had shone upon us. The modern Orthodox thinker was less comfortable attributing the Nazi genocide to God, however, and he found an alternative explanation in a creative and elegant version of the freewill argument. The Holocaust was portrayed as a tragic consequence of the divine gift to

humankind of moral choice. Insofar as evil and suffering were inevitable, then so too was the hiding of the face of God (*hester panim*) for, as Berkovits acknowledged in *Faith After the Holocaust* (1973), ‘While He shows forbearance with the wicked, he must turn a deaf ear to the anguished cries of the violated.’²² History, then, is a balancing act between God’s self-restraint in allowing human freewill, which can lead to an eclipse of the divine in a catastrophic event such as the Holocaust, and His mercy in occasional intervention, which is neatly exemplified by the rise of the Jewish State of Israel.²³ In this, Berkovits followed previous thinkers in attributing religious meaning to apparently arbitrary selection of historical events without providing a coherent rationale for so doing. Regardless, he believed that such an interpretation of recent history²⁴ allowed one to retain a semblance of faith in divine providence and even, if one were prepared to acknowledge the possibility of life after death, in the possibility of divine justice.²⁵ At the same time, Berkovits acknowledged that the enormity of the catastrophe demanded sensitivity towards those who had lost their faith (‘holy disbelief’) and condemnation of any kind of religious self-satisfaction.²⁶

The paradoxes of articulating any kind of reasonable faith after the Holocaust lie at the heart of a long essay entitled ‘Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire’ (1977) by the North American modern Orthodox rabbi, **Irving Greenberg**. In his engagement with the intellectual challenges that the Nazi onslaught represented to core Jewish beliefs (such as God, the covenant, redemption, and the value of human life), Greenberg was led to renounce the divine moral authority that underlay traditional commitment to the covenant and its commandments. If, as he had believed, ‘Judaism and Christianity... stand or fall on their fundamental claim that the human being is... of ultimate and absolute value’, and if, as he showed, the Nazis economized on gas costs by throwing babies alive into the crematoria, then the Western Judaeo-Christian world had already failed and the divine authority underlying its worldview had failed, too.²⁷ As a result, one had to reject any sense of assurance or certainty in one’s religious life,²⁸ and to view Judaism as essentially a voluntary endeavour. In a post-Holocaust world, an easy faith was untenable, and what remained was a dialectic of faith and uncertainty, or ‘troubled theism’. One could, one should, live a life of faith that was always in crisis, always haunted by doubt. Anything else was unacceptable; as he saw it: ‘Living in the dialectic becomes one of the verification principles for alternative theories after the Holocaust.’²⁹ Interestingly, well before he had broached the topic of the Holocaust, Greenberg had come to the conclusion that only voluntary adherence to the covenant would elicit true loyalty and commitment to the commandments (*mitzvot*). This he had argued with reference to the pragmatics of western liberal democracy, in the contrast to experience of totalitarian regimes.³⁰ The Holocaust, however, gave him alternative rhetorical justification for his reformulation of the foundations of traditional Judaism. This illustrates a more general point that many of the positions advocated by Holocaust theologians need not be the direct result of wrestling with the Shoah, despite appearances to the contrary.

The question of uniqueness is responsible for much of the rhetorical power of Holocaust Theology, and we have already seen how Fackenheim’s religio-philosophical analysis depended on the claim that it was an event unlike any other. One of the fiercest advocates for the uniqueness of the Holocaust was the eclectic theologian, novelist and publisher, **Arthur Cohen**, who asserted:

Thought and the death camps are incommensurable... the death camps are unthinkable... [They are] beyond the discourse of morality and rational condemnation... [The death camps represent] ‘a new event, one severed from the connection with the traditional presuppositions of history, psychology, politics, morality...’³¹

The term he chose to capture his sense of the Holocaust and the title of his book published in 1981 was *The Tremendum*, an allusion to Rudolph Otto's *Mysterium Tremendum*.³² For Cohen, Otto's idea of the Holy as the awful presence of God, near and present but unfathomable, mysterious, and terrifying, was useful for beginning to appreciate the human *tremendum*, the Holocaust, which was an 'unparalleled and unfathomable... celebration of murder.'³³ It is clear that for Cohen the Holocaust surpassed all other events in its extremity and its uniqueness. Like Fackenheim, he was obsessed with the theological challenge facing Jews, that is, the problem of how to bridge the chasm that separates them from their pre-Holocaust traditions and worldview, which are in the face of the *tremendum*, completely inadequate.³⁴ But he also questioned the usefulness of analyzing the event with the familiar conceptual tools of history or of the political and social sciences, since the Holocaust was so much more than any particular example of war, or religious or social conflict, or genocide.³⁵ Its mysterious and alien nature were expressed, in part, by linking it to Otto's phenomenological idea of the Holy.

It is striking that, regardless of whether they viewed the Shoah as unique or not, none of the thinkers considered to date suggested the oldest explanation of all for suffering, namely, divine punishment for sin. Several, most notably Rubenstein, explicitly ruled out this option as morally indefensible when applied to the innocent suffering that characterized the Holocaust. But in 1986, the Orthodox thinker **Bernard Maza** offered an account entitled *With Fury Poured Out* that viewed the catastrophe as a divine action calculated to correct the erring ways of the chosen people. The issue was the allegedly widespread failure of pre-War world Jewry to observe the Torah, that is, to live life in accordance with the divinely revealed Jewish Law. King Solomon's prophecy that 'the sun rises and the sun sets' (Ecclesiastes 1:5), which was interpreted by the Talmud as a reassurance that a sun of Torah always rises somewhere before the sun of Torah sets, was given the lie to by the Jewish youth's search for new, alternative value-systems such as socialism and secular Zionism in Eastern Europe and Palestine, and materialism in North America.³⁶ The Torah's light was about to be extinguished and so, with a magnitude never before witnessed, God reestablished His sovereignty over his children. This He accomplished 'with fury poured out', in accordance with the words of Ezekiel.³⁷ According to Maza, then, the disobedience of the Jews of Europe provoked a divinely orchestrated genocide that in turn brought about widespread return to Torah-observant Judaism elsewhere, especially in Israel and the United States.³⁸ While for Maza such action was fully reconcilable with a heavenly father who chastises those whom he loves, others might well reject it as callous in the extreme.

Someone who had little or no difficulty seeing God as callous was **David Blumenthal**. Sooner or later, someone was bound to question the assumption that God had to be all-loving and in *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (1993) the modern Orthodox scholar argued that the faithful had too often been in denial about the character of the living God. The biblical tradition could throw much light on the apparent paradox of why the omnibenevolent and omnipotent God allowed so much suffering in His creation. It was not difficult to find passages that revealed His 'dark side', such as Job's suffering for a divine wager (Job 1:6-12), or the likening of God to a man who humiliates his lover (Jeremiah 13:25-26), or the anger and violence of His actions that caused the Talmudic sages to exclaim 'Were it not written, it would be impossible to speak thus' (Sanhedrin 95b). Arguably, the Bible showed the creator to be, on occasion at least, abusive towards his creation. In considering the collective trauma of the Holocaust, Blumenthal went further still and provocatively suggested a systematic comparison with the trauma of sexual abuse. From this perspective he took the lessons that abuse was never the fault of the abused and that healing was possible, although never complete, if the abuser was confronted. Observing that no previous theodicy or defence of God's justice had been entirely satisfactory, he believed that it made sense to acknowledge the reality of the abusive relationship between God and His people.³⁹ To accept that God was not omnibenevolent did not make faith

impossible. As Blumenthal put it, ‘To have faith in a post-holocaust, abuse-sensitive world is, first, to know – to recognize and to admit – that God is an abusing God, but not always.’⁴⁰

The application of the problem of evil in theological engagement with the Holocaust, which lies behind the approaches of most of the religious thinkers considered so far, was entirely absent from the controversial contribution of the progressive Jewish liberation theologian **Marc Ellis**. With *Ending Auschwitz* (1994), Ellis attacked Holocaust Theology as a dangerous form of political theology. Too often, he argued, Jewish suffering during the Shoah was used to whitewash present day abuses of Palestinians in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Auschwitz had made the Jew the paradigmatic victim, a highly privileged status that was extended to the Jewish nation state.⁴¹ According to Ellis, the theologians shared a widespread attitude of the Jewish community that had blinded them to the kind of social inequality and misuse of power in modern Israel which the Jewish people had suffered in Nazi Europe. As he put it,

I wondered whether in a paradoxical way Auschwitz had perhaps become for Jews a place of safe haven. For if we dwell in Auschwitz, if we freeze our history at Auschwitz, we silence the questions others have of us and in fact we have of ourselves. In this way Auschwitz becomes for us a place where we can hide our accountability in the present, even as we demand it insistently of others for their past actions.⁴²

Denying that Zionism was an authentic expression of Jewish values, he challenged the assumption that the survival of Israel as an end in itself to be fought for at all costs, especially if what was sacrificed was the prophetic tradition of social justice which lay at the heart of true Judaism.⁴³ For Ellis, an authentic Holocaust Theology would intertwine the prophetic tradition with lessons from the Shoah: it would be self-critical and sensitive to real world suffering, condemnatory of any kind of ideological idolatry, including nationalism, and critical of abuses of political power, especially any attempts to marginalize others.

In 2003 another powerful critique of the dominant trends within Holocaust Theology was published that was also concerned with representing a marginalized perspective. The British Orthodox theologian **Melissa Raphael**'s *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* was the first comprehensive Jewish feminist treatment of the subject, its criticism being focused on patriarchal conceptions of the divine. The God of normative Judaism who was central to the theologians' writings was, she said, too often conflated with the notions of omnipotence and totalitarian power. According to Raphael, Maybaum had erroneously assumed the necessity of God's dominance of history by violence, Berkovits had mistakenly assumed that human dignity depended on freedom or the power of autonomy, and Rubenstein had effectively abandoned the God of patriarchal tradition because He had not been patriarchal enough.⁴⁴ Such underlying assumptions were painfully ironic considering how similar they were to the ideological conditions that produced the holocaust, that is, the Nazi idolization of masculine power. For Raphael, trained in Christian theology, the alternative was a God who suffered alongside Her children. In developing her very distinctive theology she drew heavily upon the medieval Jewish mystical belief that catastrophes that befall the Jews were catastrophic for God, tearing God apart from God-self, and that *tikkun* or restoration in God and the world could be brought about when Jews consecrated the world with their goodness. At the centre of Raphael's book was a close-reading of women's Holocaust testimony, which was used to suggest that their experiences in the camps were often more co-operative than was generally the case among men, and which emphasized the importance in survivor testimony of the acts of loving-kindness upon which camp-sisters so depended for their dignity and self-worth.⁴⁵ Lurianic kabbalistic Judaism, with its conception of a broken God whose divine sparks need to be restored to the godhead, came to serve as a 'narrative theological framework' for exploring the meaning and significance of such behaviour.⁴⁶ In this redemptive Holocaust theology, God – or the *Shekinah*, the divine presence in feminine form which was defined as 'the love of the Mother-God'⁴⁷ – was made manifest in

such acts of loving-kindness, even in the shadow of the camps.⁴⁸ Thus the confrontation with Auschwitz demanded for Raphael, as it had for Rubenstein, the abandonment of the God of tradition, although in her case the resolution was to be found in a reformulation of Jewish tradition that replaced patriarchal with matriarchal understandings of the nature of God.

Jewish Post-Holocaust Theologies: Some Trends

It is important to note that Jewish post-Holocaust Theology does not constitute a strictly coherent discourse. The various contributions are highly idiosyncratic and often too personal and too much the product of an individual thinker to justify sweeping claims about the strengths or weaknesses of theology as a specific approach to the Shoah. There is also a great deal of overlap with other disciplinary approaches, especially philosophy and history. Nonetheless, a few useful observations can be made, the most basic of which is that Jewish thinkers remain firmly focused on the implications of the catastrophe for Judaism and Jewish identity. These tend to break down into debates about the threat to the covenant between God and the People of Israel, the challenge for their scriptural resources, and the link between the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

One might have imagined that, as far as religious thinkers are concerned, the Holocaust could be readily subsumed under the more general category of responses to the problem of evil. After all, Judaism can boast of a venerable tradition of religious engagement with suffering and evil, much of which can be regarded as foundational, such as its narratives of slavery in Egypt, the Assyrian, Babylonian and Roman exiles, and to the destructions of the First and Second Temples. Persecution and martyrdom are common and prominent features of Jewish history. More generally, religious Jews as monotheists have had to wrestle with the problem that a good, loving, and wise God allows suffering and evil to occur in His creation, and have offered a wide range of explanations. Most of these can be categorized as theodicies, that is, attempts to defend the justice of God in an apparently unjust world. Examples might include the portrayal of suffering as punishment for disobedience, or as educative or character-building, or as an unavoidable consequence of the divine gift of free will. Not infrequently, suffering is treated as a mystery. Jewish Post-Holocaust Theology is somewhat ambivalent about the entire theodic tradition. As Zachary Braiterman has observed, while anti-theodic responses such as passionate protestation and the blatant refusal to defend God can be found within the religious tradition, they are a defining characteristic of several classic post-Holocaust theologies.⁴⁹

For a number of thinkers, however, the problem of evil is irrelevant for discussing the Holocaust precisely because it is regarded as unique and unparalleled in history. As such it cannot be considered as just one more example of evil or suffering, even a particularly horrific one, and therefore cannot be treated by reference to the familiar theodicies; rather, the Holocaust is seen to represent an entirely new theological problem that demands an entirely new type of engagement. Here, as elsewhere in other disciplines, the debate concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust rages fiercely and opinion is sharply divided. What makes this debate different is that it takes place in the context of a wider discourse concerning the nature of God's actions in history. For some, the Holocaust points to a kind of divine immanence that is directly comparable to the awe-ful, miraculous events of the Bible, while for others it hints at the nature of God's transcendence – or even His absence or death – in relation to human history. In most cases, the ideological background of the thinker plays a significant role in determining the extent to which his or her religious traditions and sacred writings are brought to bear on the question. Conservatives will tend to explore the issues within a more restricted framework, although often with innovative and imaginative interpretations of the mainstream texts, while progressives and radicals will, in addition, tend to look further afield, not infrequently drawing upon the scriptures of other faiths or upon the conceptual tools of social sciences and philosophy.

The kinds of religious explorations encompassed by post-Holocaust theology raise a whole host of theoretical and methodological issues for philosophers, theologians and historians. Katz has identified, among other things, debates about how to categorize historical events in relation to moral categories such as good or evil, whether historical events can confirm or deny theological affirmations, whether Jewish history is distinct from history per se, the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the implications (or not) for religion, the nature of the evidence for divine providence and of revelation, the Problem of Evil, the relevance of traditional, scriptural resources, and the connection (if any) between the Holocaust and the Land of Israel.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that some Jewish post-Holocaust theologies are theodic in nature and concerned to justify God's ways, Braiterman's perceptive observation that several key works are best described as 'antitheodic' (or that they emphasize such an attitude, at least) hints at the way in which they can be distinguished from other theologies of suffering. Recently, Garner has added the category of 'atheodic' to include those approaches 'which seek to neither justify nor protest God's relation to suffering; rather they seek to focus on consolatory themes of divine co-suffering, restoration/healing, or the dissolution of the problem into divine mystery / inscrutability'.⁵¹ In particular, Garner has noted the coincidence that a remarkable number of Jewish theologies have drawn upon Jewish mysticism and attributes this, at least in part, to a tendency to refuse to address the traditional challenge of evil and suffering. Might such characteristic features of the discourse indicate the profound influence of the Holocaust? Not according to Solomon, who would be quick to counter that it is modernity and the loss of trust in traditional authority and scripture, rather than the Holocaust itself, that has brought about the refusal to attempt to justify God in the face of catastrophic human suffering.⁵² In this context, Morgan's study of the interplay between contemporary culture and the Jewish religious responses, reinforces the importance of historicity, that is, the historical-situatedness of the thinkers, for understanding the development of their ideas, and in particular the way in which Jewish thinkers have grappled with the question of whether an historical event (in this case, the Shoah) can influence or modify a religious tradition.⁵³ It is worth stressing one important concern here, namely, the role of God in the arena of history. The rationalist, naturalist assumptions that have characterized the study of history in the west for two centuries had convinced liberal-minded Jewish and Christian theologians to be very cautious about using the past as evidence for God's active engagement in the world, and even to refrain from so doing.⁵⁴ As we have seen, the Holocaust has enticed a good number of thinkers to reconsider this position and to seek to demonstrate the divine presence in history from a post-Holocaust perspective. Arguably, this represents the key intellectual contribution of post-Holocaust Theology to the academic discipline of modern theology more generally.

Finally, a word about how the ideas of Jewish post-Holocaust theologies have fared in their constituent community. The importance given to the Holocaust by Jewish theologians is generally shared within the wider Jewry, and many of the academic debates can be found reflected in popular discourse, too. The challenge to the religious and communal establishment has been successful in that the Holocaust is centre-stage in popular Jewish religious and non-religious culture, even if there is certainly a fierce debate between those who view the centrality of the Holocaust as an obsession with victimhood, and those who believe it to be vital for ensuring Jewish continuity.

Contributions of Post-Holocaust Theology to Multireligious Conversation

Let us now attempt to answer the question as to whether or not Jewish religious responses to the Shoah have anything to contribute to contemporary multireligious conversation. There is certainly considerable overlap between Jewish post-Holocaust theology and modern Jewish-Christian dialogue. In exploring these points of overlap, it seems helpful to

draw upon the text of *Dabru Emet* (*Speak Truth*, 2002), a manifesto signed by hundreds of Jewish religious leaders scholars from a range of perspectives. It presents itself as a Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity in response to Christian efforts in recent decades to improve interfaith relations. Comprising eight statements with commentary, *Dabru Emet* is the nearest thing we have to a collective Jewish contribution to the contemporary Jewish-Christian conversation and can be regarded as indicative about Jewish interests and concerns in that context. We will conclude, then, with a consideration of what might constitute a corrective to *Dabru Emet* in light of our thinkers' views on related topics.

1. "Jews and Christians worship the same God." Here *Dabru Emet* emphasizes the shared worship of the God of Israel in order to emphasize what binds, rather than what divides. Our thinkers can provide several interesting variations on this theme. Few would follow Maybaum's dark vision of history as the realm of Gentile Christianity, wherein God can only communicate effectively with the non-Jewish world through the use of the bloody sacrifice and crucifixion of the Jewish people. But Raphael's portrayal of a God who shares in the suffering of with His/Her People reminds us that ostensibly Christian motifs in Jewish theology can be used to powerful effect. Raphael expresses this conception of the divine in the language of Lurianic kabbalah, and in this use of mysticism she is not alone and follows in a well established tradition preceded by Rubenstein, Cohen, Jonas, Fackenheim, and Blumenthal.
2. "Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book: the Bible." While acknowledging differences of interpretation of the *Tanakh* or Old Testament, *Dabru Emet* points to the way in which a shared scripture reinforces a shared belief in a creator God who established a covenant with His People Israel, who teaches righteousness and who will one day redeem Israel and the world. Among our thinkers, scripture is approached as authoritative means by which to achieve a range of different ends. Berkovits weaves an elegant free-will defence to the problem of evil around the biblical image of God hiding His face. Maza draws heavily upon the Bible to suggest an older, more familiar explanation for suffering, namely, punishment for sins. Greenberg alludes to biblical motifs of confusion and pain, such as Job and the Suffering Servant, to sustain his argument that, after the Holocaust, the only appropriate kind of faith is one characterized by doubt. At the same time, there is concern about problematic texts which reveal God to be callous and abusive towards His children, as Blumenthal asserts.
3. "Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel." Here *Dabru Emet* connects the reestablishment of the Jewish State to the Shoah by referring to it as the most important event for Jews since the Holocaust. Many of our thinkers would make a still more explicit connection with the State of Israel. Berkovits and Fackenheim and Greenberg would all see a Zionist response as the only reasonable stance to adopt after this evidence of divine providence; for Fackenheim and Greenberg, there is even a view of the State as the embodiment of new divine revelation. In contrast, Ellis presents a stern critique of such theological justifications of Israel, arguing that to imbue it with such transcendent meanings can only threaten any political solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict and undermines the traditional Jewish prophetic concern to help the powerless.
4. "Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah." *Dabru Emet* comments on this statement that 'central to the moral principles of the Torah is the inalienable sanctity and dignity of every human being', suggesting that a shared moral emphasis represents the basis of an improved relationship between Jews and Christians. Such a sentiment was precisely what lay at the heart of Greenberg's stinging critique of the failure of Jews and Christians to prevent an event in which children could be burned alive in the furnaces to save a few pennies, and of his call to recover the sanctity of human life or see Judaism and Christianity fail to recover their moral authority after the challenge of Nazism. This moral sensitivity, shared by Christian and

Jew alike, has led to the pronounced anti-theodic character of much post-holocaust theology, that is, the refusal of many of our thinkers to attempt a moral justification of God's ways after the Shoah. With a few exceptions, such as Maybaum and Maza, none have been comfortable offering a theological solution, with Rubenstein going so far as to announce the 'death of God', Greenberg arguing that God has lost His moral authority, and Blumenthal denouncing God as an abuser of His people.

5. "Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon." In this context, *Dabru Emet* prefers to focus the blame on Nazi racist policies rather than Christian theology, although it notes that without Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against the Jews, Nazi ideology could certainly not have taken hold. This statement of interfaith diplomacy stands in stark contrast to the views expressed by our thinkers. While several, such as Fackenheim and Cohen, believe it impossible to comprehend the event and despair at its ultimately irrational, incomprehensible nature, others are quick to point to its theological origins. For Rubenstein, religious constructs such as the idea of the Chosen People have led Christians and others to antisemitism, such that only the destruction of such ideas (as set out in his programmatic theology of the death of God) offers any hope. For Berkovits, who sees Jewish suffering as the inevitable result of those who hate God and who view His Chosen People as His representative on earth, the list of persecutions faced by the People of Israel includes Christians as well as Nazis. And the historian Greenberg captures the mood perfectly by suggesting that a growing awareness of the failure of the Churches to defend Jews or oppose Hitler effectively during the Third Reich fatally compromises the moral and religious authority of Christianity.

6. "The humanly irreconcilable differences between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in scripture." According to *Dabru Emet*, the key difference is that Christians know and serve God through Christ while Jews accomplish the same through Torah and Jewish tradition, and the assertion is made that this difference will remain until the final redemption. But one of the most interesting implications of post-Holocaust theology, both Jewish and Christian, is the idea that the Holocaust cannot be left out of such an equation. For Maybaum, Cohen, Fackenheim, and Greenberg, the Shoah is nothing less than new revelation, competing with and trumping Torah and Jewish tradition. For others, the Holocaust is a moment of history that radically alters the meaning of Judaism itself, whether it means the end of supernaturalism (Rubenstein) or patriarchy (Raphael). All this raises profound questions concerning the historicism and religious belief and problematizes the idea that the two millennia long Jewish-Christian argument is in any sense fixed.

7. "A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice." The concern expressed here reflects a fear of more Orthodox participants in interfaith dialogue that such activities will lead to conversion or assimilation. The issue of Jewish continuity also looms large among our thinkers. With the possible exception of Maybaum, who sees the destruction of central European orthodox Jewry as a necessary evil, and Ellis, who has suggested that Jewish survival may be too high a price for the betrayal of the Jewish prophetic tradition of siding with the oppressed against the oppressors, all our thinkers are concerned about what form Judaism must take to ensure Jewish continuity. Undoubtedly, there is a reformist agenda to many of their theologies, reflective of a much wider variety of Jewish perspectives. Rubenstein's rejection of God does not mean he rejects Jewish practice and Jewish communal life and he experiments with a kind of Jewish neo-paganism before settling upon more mystical conceptions. Raphael's feminist critique seeks to rid Judaism of patriarchal trappings. As we have already noted, Berkovits and Greenberg, along with Fackenheim, stress a political dimension to the solution, namely, the State of Israel as a safe haven. Fackenheim's commandment to refuse Hitler a posthumous victory is premised on the reality of Jewish determination to live on as Jews, which he came to see as a sacred thing whether the Jew be religious or not. And as for those stymied by

God's apparent betrayal of the Covenant, Greenberg argues that the nature of the Covenant has changed in that it is now voluntary in nature, and Blumenthal's metaphor of abuse likewise suggests a very different conceptualization of the relationship between God and His children, even as it provides a psychological framework to assist in allowing the victims to move on.

8. "Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace." This final statement seeks to unite not only Jews and Christians but also 'those of other faith communities' in helping to bring about the kingdom of God. A stress on social justice features prominently among Jewish post-holocaust thinkers, too, as the key lesson to be learned from the Shoah, if one can speak in such terms. It is central to Fackenheim whose macro view sought 'to mend the world', as it is for Raphael whose micro view focuses on acts of loving-kindness between suffering individuals. Both Greenberg and Ellis draw up lists of such ethical imperatives that followed from an analysis of Jewish oppression and genocide, even as they reached very different political conclusions.

Conclusion

Overall, Jewish post-Holocaust theology seems largely in accordance with the positions espoused in *Dabru Emet*. There is general agreement that the Holocaust remains an important pillar upon which Jewish-Christian relations are premised, that a pro-Israel position follows from the lessons of powerlessness taught by the Holocaust, that Jewish continuity is viewed as desirable while mission to the Jews is viewed as undesirable, and that social justice offers a pragmatic justification for interfaith work. Nevertheless, it seems fair to say that Jewish post-Holocaust theologies do offer a few interesting variations on the themes that unite Jewish participants in interfaith dialogue. Firstly, there is a tendency towards an anti-theodic or atheodic worldview, and an admission of a troubled faith, which seems at odds with the more self-assured declarations of faith that characterize *Dabru Emet*. Secondly, there is a related sense that radical re-readings or even rejection of traditional scriptural resources are demanded in a post-Holocaust world, and that non-normative sources of inspiration, such as mysticism or even Christian motifs such as a suffering God, can be useful. Thirdly, the Holocaust itself is regarded by some as a kind of new revelation, demanding radical reformation of Judaism of one sort or another. Fourthly, there is real interest in working out the nature of God's action in history in such a direct manner as would embarrass many within the interfaith community, with a number of thinkers asserting God's active presence during the Shoah. The fact that for many involved in interreligious dialogue such ideas are, by and large, of little consequence would be regarded as damning by some of the most innovative and driven Jewish minds of the last half-century.

Daniel Langton is professor of the history of Jewish-Christian relations at the University of Manchester (UK) and co-director of the Centre for Jewish Studies. Dr. Langton is also secretary of the European Association for Jewish Studies and is a Leverhulme Major Research Fellow 2013-2015.

¹ This discussion of the ideas and trends is reproduced with permission from chapter 'Theology' in Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Daniel R. Langton, *Writing the Holocaust*, Writing History (London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011).

² The genre appears more developed in historically Protestant countries, and less so in Catholic and, especially, Orthodox ones. There are also, of course, a number of important Israeli responses although these are not well represented in this short survey. See 'Israeli Responses' in Steven T. Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg, *Wrestling with God : Jewish*

Theological Responses During and after the Holocaust (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³ Ignaz Maybaum, *The Face of God after Auschwitz* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Genneep, 1965), 21.

⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁷ Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz : Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 153.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ At the centre of this brand of Christian theology were Altizer and Hamilton. See Thomas J. J. Altizer and William Hamilton, *Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis,: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).

¹⁰ Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz : Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*, 152.

¹¹ Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz : History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism*, 2nd ed., Johns Hopkins Jewish Studies (Baltimore ; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 298-300.

¹² Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," in *Out of the Whirlwind; a Reader of Holocaust Literature*, ed. Albert H. Friedlander (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1968), 465.

¹³ Ibid., 466.

¹⁴ Ibid., 467.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 468.

¹⁷ Ibid., 470.

¹⁸ Ibid., 472. Later, Jonas is more explicit still: 'Not because he [God] chose to, but because he *could* not intervene did he fail to intervene.' Hans Jonas and Lawrence Vogel, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 140.

¹⁹ Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," 471-472. Later, Jonas contrasted the answer of the Book of Job, which invokes 'the plenitude of God's power', to his own answer which is premised on God's 'chosen voidance of such power.' Jonas and Vogel, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz*, 142.

²⁰ Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz," 473.

²¹ Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History : Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 27.

²² Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973), 61.

²³ Ibid., 107.

²⁴ Berkovits argued that, more generally, the survival of the Jew down through history revealed 'the presence of a hiding God'. Eliezer Berkovits, *With God in Hell : Judaism in the Ghettos and Deathcamps* (New York ; London: Sanhedrin Press, 1979), 83.

²⁵ Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, 136.

²⁶ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁷ Ibid., 3-4, 9.

²⁸ 'Let us offer, then, as a working principle the following: no statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children.' Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity and Modernity after the Holocaust," in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?: Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. E. Fleischner (New York: Ktav, 1977), 23.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Irving Greenberg, "Change and the Orthodox Community," *Response* 7, no. 1 (1969): 62, 65.

³¹ Arthur Allen Cohen, *The Tremendum : A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 1, 8-10.

³² Rudolf Otto and John Wilfred Harvey, *The Idea of the Holy : An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923). First published in German as Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau, 1917).

³³ Cohen, *The Tremendum : A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, 17-19.

³⁴ Ibid., 82.

³⁵ Ibid., 7-10, 39, 45.

³⁶ Bernard Maza, *With Fury Poured Out* (Hoboken NJ: KTAV, 1986), 120.

³⁷ 'As I live, says the Lord, that only with a strong hand and an outstretched arm and with fury poured out will I be King over thee.' (Ezekiel 20:33).

³⁸ Maza, *With Fury Poured Out*, 124-127.

³⁹ David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God : A Theology of Protest*, 1st ed. ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 170.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 248.

⁴¹ Marc H. Ellis, *Ending Auschwitz : The Future of Jewish and Christian Life*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 28.

⁴² Ibid., 24.

⁴³ Ibid., 40-41.

⁴⁴ Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz : A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 33-38.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 105-106.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 117-118. The *shekinah* was the dwelling presence of God traditionally associated with the revelations at the burning bush, Mount Sinai and in the tabernacle in the wilderness.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁹ Braiterman focuses his attention on Richard Rubinstein, Emil Fackenheim, and Eliezer Berkovits. Zachary Braiterman, *(God) after Auschwitz : Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁵⁰ Katz, Biderman, and Greenberg, *Wrestling with God : Jewish Theological Responses During and after the Holocaust*, 4. See also Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues : Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York ; London: New York University Press, 1983).

⁵¹ Dan Garner, "Antitheodicy, Atheodicy and Jewish Mysticism in Holocaust Theology" (PhD, University of Manchester, 2009), 8.

⁵² Norman Solomon, "Jewish Responses to the Holocaust," in *An Address to the Consultation of the Anti-Defamation League of Bnai Brith and the Polish Bishops' Conference* (Birmingham: Centre for the Study of Judaism and Jewish/Christian Relations, 1988).

⁵³ Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz : Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (Oxford [England] ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁴ For a useful overview of the ways in which rationalist historicism has profoundly shaped Christian theology, specifically, in the last two centuries, see Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Historicism : The Once and Future Challenge for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006).