*The Journal of Interreligious Studies*

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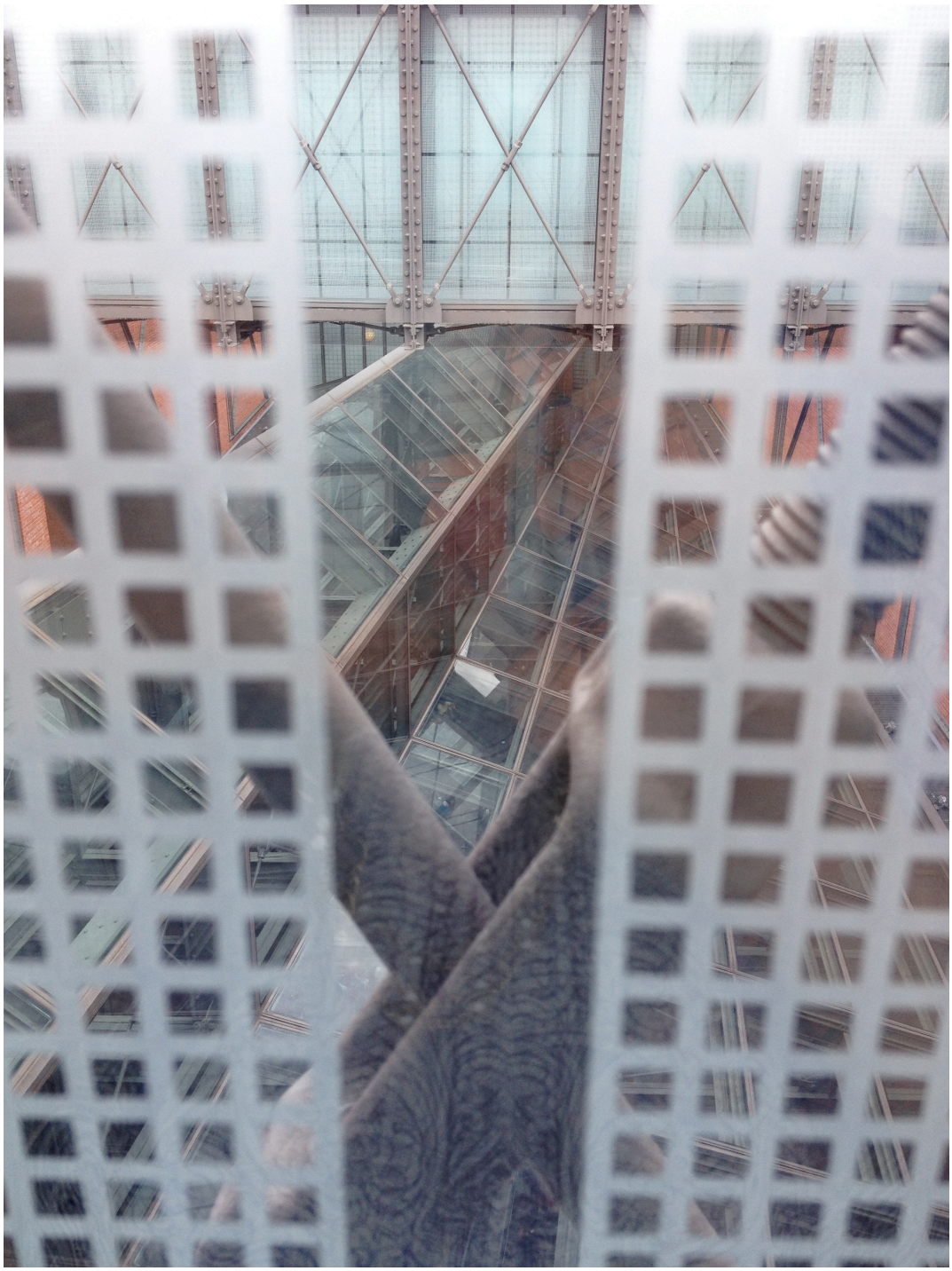

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Dear Readers,

Founded in 2008 by a pioneering group of young scholars, the first issue of the Journal of Interreligious Dialogue went online in February of 2009. Since that time the Journal, a peer-reviewed publication, has emerged as a significant forum for the exploration of interreligious engagement in theory and practice.

Finding its first institutional home at Auburn Theological Seminary (2010-2012), the Journal is now a program of CIRCLE, the Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education at Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College.

With this shift in 2013, Rabbi Or Rose and Dr. Jennifer Peace, co-directors of CIRCLE, became the publishing editors of the Journal; they are now joined by Celene Ayat Ibrahim-Lizzio, the third co-director of CIRCLE.

We are most grateful to be able to continue to bring you the Journal free of charge, thanks to the generous support and dedication of many individuals, institutions and foundations. In particular, we wish to thank the Henry Luce Foundation for its ongoing support of our programs.

As the Journal evolves, we are also making some changes. Most notably, this winter, the Journal has changed its name from the *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* to the *Journal of Interreligious Studies*. This new name acknowledges both the breadth of past contributions to the Journal and the language employed in this emerging, interdisciplinary field. This name change dovetails with the recent creation of the "Interreligious and Interfaith Studies" group at the American Academy of Religion (AAR), co-chaired by Dr. Homayra Ziad and Dr. Jennifer Peace.

In addition to the new name, we have shifted to a publishing schedule of three issues annually. Our winter issue, published in January, focused on publishing outstanding papers from the AAR, particularly papers presented under the auspices of the new group. Our spring issue (as reflected here) will be curated by a guest editor each year and organized around a specific topic.

This issue's guest editor is Dr. Victoria Barnett, Director of Programs on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust at the United States Holocaust. Dr. Barnett is a graduate of Indiana University, Union Theological Seminary, New York (M. Div.), and George Mason University (Ph.D.). She is the author of *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (Oxford University Press, 1992) and *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Greenwood Press, 1999), and editor/translator of Wolfgang Gerlach's *And the Witnesses were Silent: the Confessing Church and the Jews* (University of Nebraska Press, 2000) and *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* (Fortress Press, 2000), as well as numerous articles and book chapters on the churches during the Holocaust. She is one of the general editors of the *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works English Edition*, the English translation series of Bonhoeffer's complete works published by Fortress Press.

We are also committed to including the voices of students and emerging scholars; for example, in this issue, we include two book reviews by *State of Formation* scholars. Our fall issue will be an open call to a wide range of contributions, as has been the model for all of our past issues.

Finally, readers of this issue might want to revisit our Spring 2012 issue, where Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg reflected on dialogue, and where his reflection was joined by responses by *State of Formation* Contributing Scholars, in a model of online dialogue and shared reflection.

In closing, we want to thank our dedicated readers as well as all those involved in publishing the Journal. We feel blessed to be working with a talented team of staff, board members, and advisors as we participate in the dynamic and divergent conversations taking place about the nature of this emerging area of study and practice.

Sincerely, on behalf of the JIRS editors and staff,

Stephanie Varnon-Hughes

# The Holocaust and Its Implications for Contemporary Interreligious Studies: An introduction to this issue of the *Journal of Inter-religious Studies*

## By Victoria J. Barnett

The Holocaust—the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators-- unfolded in a nation and on a continent that was predominantly Christian with a long history of violence and persecution against its Jewish population, much of it propagated in the name of Christianity. For that reason the Holocaust raised fundamental challenges for the Jewish-Christian relationship. It unfolded in a nation and on a continent that was predominantly Christian and had a long history of violence and persecution against its Jewish population. Although the victims of Nazi terror from 1933-1945 included many other groups, ranging from political opponents in Germany to the Roma people to civilians throughout Europe, the planned and intentional genocide of the European Jews was a central priority of Nazi ideology and policy, and the reactions to the persecution of the Jews throughout Europe as well as in the United States were often openly shaped by religious prejudice.

Yet, this history raises a number of issues that have broader relevance for the study of religion and could be instructive for contemporary interreligious studies. The sheer enormity of this event opened the door to a new body of literature on theodicy. This history offers abundant examples of the dynamics of evil and complicity and of the ways in which "religion"—whether through its institutions, its leaders and members, or its texts—can become a murderous and ideological tool. The persecution and genocide of the European Jews first in Nazi Germany, and then throughout occupied Europe, is a horrific case study in how a minority population can be targeted as "the other." The ways in which ordinary people throughout Europe became perpetrators, "bystanders", or rescuers and resisters, challenge us with complex questions about human ethical behavior. Throughout Europe there were theologians and church leaders who developed ethnicized versions of their faith that combined the racialized ideology of National Socialism with traditional doctrine. There were also some groups and individuals, however, whose faith led them to become rescuers and resisters, and the attempts of various church leaders throughout this period at interreligious engagement and peacemaking are a fascinating and still largely understudied topic. The history of the post-Holocaust Jewish Christian relationship is another remarkable aspect of this history that bears examination. The questions that could be opened up in a course on contemporary interreligious ethics are endless: are there aspects of religion that open it to dangerous ideological alliances? How do religious people rethink and revise their doctrine and their theology after such an event? The study of the Holocaust offers a well-documented case study in such issues.

Any analysis of such issues by theologians and religious scholars begins with the history itself. There is now a solid foundation of scholarship on the role of the churches in Nazi Germany as well as historical research on the responses of religious populations throughout Nazi-occupied Europe and North Africa, the reactions of religious leaders around the world, and the factors that shaped their reactions. There is a growing body of scholarship on how religious leaders addressed the aftermath, beginning with the groundbreaking 1947 Seelisberg conference in Switzerland. Over subsequent decades the body of theological reflection known as post-Holocaust theology emerged as well as a new kind of dialogue between Jews and Christians

which in recent years has expanded to include representatives of all faiths. All these areas of historical and theological scholarship offer rich material for study and reflection for the field of interreligious studies and for the world of interreligious engagement in general.

History as a discipline, and this history in particular, can offer powerful insights into such engagement. Historical work gives us the concrete record and the actual details that must be considered when we attempt to draw theological and ethical conclusions. The historical record of religious leaders and communities during the Holocaust is a complex one that prevents simplistic conclusions. It includes the record of Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox church leaders who embraced National Socialism, as well as those who courageously opposed it. It includes the records of Muslims who rescued their neighbors in countries like Albania and Tunisia, as well as the history of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem who embraced common cause with the Nazi regime for his own political aims. The reactions of some religious leaders were shaped by their theological understandings; others were driven more by factors like nationalism and institutional self-interest. This history shows us how certain theological interpretations of scriptural texts can be used to justify the murder of innocent human beings. It illustrates the ways in which the institutional church all too often made the same moral compromises as other German institutions. The ways in which Germans, church leaders, and others addressed this historical record after 1945 is instructive for other post-genocidal situations. The unfolding history of Jewish-Christian dialogue after 1945 offers rich insights into other difficult interreligious conversations.

Like every other event in human history, the Holocaust has certain characteristics that are unique and others that lend themselves to comparison. Historians make such distinctions not to rank these events in order of importance or to compare the suffering of different victim groups, but to better understand how specific circumstances shaped the history and the reactions of those who were part of it. Historically, for example, most genocides and other forms of widespread political violence have unfolded in the context of territorial disputes or civil wars. In contrast, the persecution and genocide of the European Jews began in peacetime and in a nation with a fairly assimilated Jewish population that was smaller than 1%. By 1945 it had encompassed an entire continent and was no longer being perpetrated solely by the Germans; civilian populations throughout European had joined in the persecution and murder of their Jewish neighbors. Moreover, the pervasive antisemitism in Europe as well as in North America shaped the reactions of the world to this genocide and its victims as it unfolded.

These are some of the distinctive features in this history—and yet there are other aspects, including the dehumanization of the Nazis' victims, the ways in which ordinary people became complicit, and the factors that led some people to become rescuers—that lend themselves to comparative study. And as scholars examine newly available archival material—such as historical records from French North Africa—they gain new insights into both the particulars of this history and its broader implications. Aomar Boum's new book, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (based upon his research as a research fellow at the Museum in 2012-13), is an example of how such new research can open the door to new conversations that have implications not just for historians, but for people engaged in interreligious dialogue.

Most importantly, the history of the events from 1933 to 1945 tells a profoundly human story that touches most people—whether they are visiting scholars or tourists, whether they come from the U.S. or another part of the world. I believe that it's the human connection—our capacity to feel empathy, outrage, solidarity, shame, and to reflect on history because we want to understand its implications for us today—that explains the numbers of people who visit the

Museum each year as well as the continued interest in Holocaust history in classrooms around the world.

The articles in this issue of the *Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* explore many of these themes. They are examples of the broad scope of scholarship and the challenging questions that are laying the foundation for scholars of interreligious studies to study and analyze the Holocaust and its implications. Each article in its own way illustrates the different approaches and the complexities of the issues that arise. Rachel Baum, Khaleel Mohammed, and John Roth write about the ways in which conversations about the Holocaust influenced their Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue. Daniel Langton gives an overview of post-Holocaust Jewish theology and its possible application for broader multifaith conversations. A roundtable discussion by a group of Christian seminary professors and scholars illustrates how post-Holocaust Christian theology has informed their teaching. Professor Beverly Mitchell analyzes how her study of the Holocaust and of slavery has shaped her theological emphasis on the significance of human dignity and the way she teaches her courses on human rights. Finally, several members of the State of Formation speak about the impact of their recent visit to the USHMM in Washington, D.C.

It's an ongoing conversation and one that will shape the fields of Holocaust studies and interreligious studies. I'm very grateful to the editors of the *Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* for inviting me to be part of it, and I look forward to seeing the responses of the readers of this journal.

***Editor's note:*** The book *Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue* (reviewed in this issue) was written by a group of professors, many of whom had focused on the teaching of the Holocaust. In October 2007, as part of their writing process, they came to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for a two-day workshop. The following articles by three group members reflect on how this continues to shape their thinking.

## Know before Whom You Stand

## By John K. Roth

*"Do you feel our coming here is a good move?"*

Peter Haas, October 29, 2007

In the summer of 1995, I arrived in Norway for a sabbatical year that included research about the ways in which Nazi Germany's "Final Solution" targeted even the very small population of Norwegian Jews who lived north of the Arctic Circle. The items on my "to do" list included meeting an early August application deadline for participation in the first of a series of biennial symposia on the Shoah. Organized by Leonard Grob and Henry Knight, the symposium would take place the following June at Wroxton College, Oxfordshire, England. Grob and Knight convened and sustained a group of scholars—international, interdisciplinary, interfaith, and intergenerational—whose tenth meeting takes place in June 2014. From its inception, the Wroxton symposium has tapped its roots in Holocaust studies to advance reflection and action focused on present-day situations, particularly those in which ethical and spiritual concerns loom large. Its members commit to working together beyond the few days that we spend at Wroxton College every other year. Writing projects play a key role in that commitment.

One of the books in a growing list of Wroxton-related publications is *Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars Confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. It resulted from Grob's patient but persistent persuasion that Holocaust scholars should share how their perspectives shed light on the dilemmas and prospects in that fraught situation. Work on that project led to the realization that the Wroxton writing circle could and should be enlarged to include Muslim voices in what largely had been Jewish-Christian discussions.

Dialogue needed to become *trialogue*. So it was that in the autumn of 2006, sixteen persons accepted invitations from Grob and me to work together on a writing project that eventually became the book called *Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue*. Consisting of six scholars from each of the Abrahamic traditions, this cohort agreed to pursue a writing plan in which each chapter would have three parts: an essay by the primary author; responses by two other members of the writing circle, each of them representing a tradition different from that of the main essayist; the latter's reply to the responses. Beyond this structure, the aim was to see how trialogue could address the fact that in the new millennium "collisions of faith" among the Abrahamic traditions have contributed to violence that threatens the well-being of individuals and groups worldwide. More than that, our writing group agreed that it would be worthwhile to engage in this reflection by making the Holocaust—a catastrophe

spawned by Christian hostility to Judaism and Jews—a touchstone and compass that show what can happen when individuals and religious traditions fail to regard the other as inviolable.

Fortunately, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C., Victoria J. Barnett, staff director of the Committee on Church Relations and the Holocaust (now the Committee on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust), learned about the project, concurred that the Holocaust could orient and ground it, and invited all eighteen contributors to the museum for a three-day workshop, October 29-31, 2007. We were gifted with the opportunity to meet one another face-to-face—some of us for the first time—as we explored ways in which engagement with the Holocaust might help inform creative approaches to Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations.

Prior to arriving at the museum, the writers had been drafting their chapters, but everyone was encouraged to leave writing time and space to allow the experience awaiting us at USHMM to affect what we most needed to say. First at a Sunday evening gathering in the hotel where we were staying and then on Monday morning in a USHMM classroom, our seminar began conventionally with the contributors describing where their chapter drafts were going. Caution diminished and intensity grew as we explored museum exhibitions—together, in small groups, and individually—and then reconvened to share what we had seen and learned, felt and discerned. We found that it was one thing to be in the museum as an individual Jew, Christian, or Muslim, and something different and special to be there up close and personal with women and men whose traditions were different from and yet related to our own. This ferment influenced how we continued to think about what we were writing. What might engagement with the Holocaust teach us about key dangers of religious exclusivism? Would such engagement help us learn what inclusiveness and pluralism ought to mean? At a time when many Jews and Christians mistrust "the Muslim other"—and at a time when many Muslims mistrust both "the Jewish other" and the "Christian" West—could our time together at USHMM help us all to see how the three traditions could work to dispel such mistrust? In our own ways, each of us looked deeper to consider how confronting the Holocaust needed to shape what we were finding most important about encountering the stranger.

During our morning session on Tuesday, October 30, the Jewish scholar Peter Haas raised a question that we all wanted to address: "Do you feel our coming here is a good move?"

As I recall and the detailed seminar notes of Zayn Kassam confirm, nobody said *no*, but everybody agreed that doing interreligious trialogue explicitly in the presence of the Shoah increased the trialogue's weight, partly because standing in that presence complicated our senses of personal and communal identity and made us think long, hard, and critically about what is most valuable and most problematic about our traditions and their interactions. We contemplated the shared feeling that in ways very different and yet closely related our traditions were vulnerable and shattered by the experiences recorded at USHMM. The words *decentering* and *recentering* threaded through our conversation. The former signified the challenge and need to be genuinely hospitable to the stranger and to welcome the pluralism such hospitality entails. The latter meant re-envisioning our own traditions so that their particularity advances rather than hinders the understanding, respect, and action that trialogue at its best can inspire.

At least for me, one experience shared at USHMM became pivotal as we worked toward decentering and recentering ourselves and our traditions. While exploring the permanent exhibition at USHMM, the contributors to *Encountering the Stranger* stood before the remnants of a Torah ark from the synagogue in the German town of Nentershausen. Desecrated but not destroyed completely in the November 1938 pogroms collectively called Kristallnacht, this Torah ark is honored within the museum, which is appropriate because the *Aron ha-Kodesh* (the Holy Ark), as it is called in Hebrew, occupies a special, sacred space in every synagogue.[1] It

does so because the ark houses scrolls, precious possessions for each and every Jewish community, that contain inscriptions of the Pentateuch, the Five Books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—the most important parts of the Hebrew Bible (*Tanakh*).

Visitors to USHMM are not told what happened to the Torah scrolls that were once safely kept in the ark of the Nentershausen synagogue. It is not far-fetched, however, to think that those scrolls, like so many others during the years of the Holocaust, were mutilated and burned. So, as one stands before the Torah ark at USHMM, an absence can be felt. Disrespect for and defacing of the other, as the scarred and empty Torah ark suggests, would silence—if it could—scripture that proclaims one God to be the creator of the world and human life, tells the story of Abraham, whose faith gave birth to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and affirms that "you shall love your neighbor as yourself."[2]

Absence and silence can be intensified as one stands before the Nentershausen Torah ark at USHMM because, while the Torah scrolls from the Nentershausen ark are missing, Hebrew writing on its lintel, a supporting beam or mantel above the ark's doors, is not. Like many Torah arks, the one at Nentershausen had an inscription taken from the Talmud, the authoritative rabbinical commentary on the Torah: *Da lifnei mi attah omeyd*—Know before Whom you stand.[3] These words, which call one to attention and accountability, to reverence and awe before God, the source and sustainer of life, did not escape the notice of those who plundered the Nentershausen synagogue in November 1938, for an unknown assailant attacked them in a violent attempt to silence their voice, erase their authority, and eradicate their credibility. Their scarred condition bears witness to shameless arrogance even as the wounded words provide a fragile and poignant, if not forlorn, judgment against the hubris and hatred that divide humankind.[4]

When the contributors to *Encountering the Stranger* reconvened for discussion after exploring USHMM's permanent exhibition, the trialogue concentrated for a time on the Torah ark from Nentershausen. We came to feel that the ark had addressed us through the words on its lintel: Know before Whom you stand. Differences in our religious traditions meant that our experiences were not identical during and after the time when we faced those words, but all of us agreed that the encounter with the desecrated Torah ark and its scarred inscription made us deeply aware of concerns we shared. Whether our identities were Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, we all could feel the loss, including the denial of freedom to practice one's religion that would be ours if places and writings sacred in our own traditions were so horrifically disrespected and profaned. We could also feel abhorrence for any person or community identified with our own tradition who would stoop to such atrocity, an experience that made us mindful of our accountability and responsibility for the traditions that are ours.

With an audience that included the numerous museum staff whom Barnett especially invited to attend, a public discussion brought our time at USHMM to a close. The speakers included the Jewish scholars Rachel Baum and David Patterson. Khaleel Mohammed and Sana Tayyen represented Islam. Didier Pollefeyt and I spoke as Christians. My remarks noted that since USHMM's opening in 1993, it has frequently been a place where things happen for the first time. The Wroxton symposium, too, has been a place where things have happened for the first time. Of course, before and after our time at USHMM, scholars have shared their papers in countless meetings, and Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue is more common in 2014 than it was in 2007. But in the history of USHMM, the Wroxton symposium, and that of Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue something distinctive did take place when scholars from those traditions were welcomed by the Museum to explore how attention devoted to the Holocaust might challenge, inspire, and advance interreligious understanding.

During our discussions at USHMM, we often wondered what would happen after we left that place and how our traditions could best make a positive difference in our suffering world. That wondering referred not only to the three traditions that met there, but also to the recognition that far from being monolithic each of the three is multi-faceted. Some of the most instructive and compelling moments in our time together took place when Muslims, or Jews, or Christians vigorously engaged and disagreed with one another—sometimes about the Holocaust itself—allowing the rest of us to listen and learn in ways that we had not experienced often enough.

Confronting the Holocaust makes nothing easy. To the contrary, engaging the Holocaust tends to complicate everything. Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue is no exception to those judgments. This is true because one cannot fully encounter the Holocaust without facing the contemporary world, too. At one point in our USHMM discussion, I asked: What would our trialogue be like if we took the Holocaust off the table? The response was that our trialogue would be polite and "nice," but probably it would lack the urgency, intensity, and, importantly, the vulnerability that our standing together before the Nentershausen ark brought to the fore.

In 1995, I scarcely could have imagined that participation in the Wroxton symposium would take me to USHMM in the way it did in October 2007. Time at USHMM did much to advance *Encountering the Stranger*. Those discussions, however, also delayed the book's publication because rethinking and rewriting went on for some time before Leonard Grob and I had a final manuscript to submit to the editors at the University of Washington Press, which published the volume in 2012. By that time trialogue-oriented discussions and books were proliferating, a fortunate trend that needs to be amplified and enlarged.[5]

Not many of those discussions and books center on the Holocaust and its reverberations, but that event remains waiting for the Abrahamic traditions to engage it trialogically. The contributors to *Encountering the Stranger* experienced that such engagement compels expanded comprehension and deepened gravity about where and before whom we all stand. Well shared, that experience will always be one that needs to guide and govern Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations.

**John K. Roth** is a professor of philosophy of religion (retired) at Claremont McKenna College. He has worked as a Holocaust scholar, ethicist, and founded the Center for the Study of the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights (now the Center for Human Rights Leadership) in 2003 at Claremont McKenna College.

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[1] Authorized and incited by Nazi leaders when a minor German official died after an assassination attempt by a young Jew named Herschel Grynszpan, the antisemitic riots of Kristallnacht ("crystal night") targeted Jewish communities throughout Germany and Austria on November 9-10, 1938. Sometimes those November pogroms are referred to as the "Night of Broken Glass" because the wreckage included so many smashed windows that the replacement value reached more than two million dollars in the cash equivalent at the time. The onslaught was far more devastating than that. A great many Germans, their religious heritage and identity overwhelmingly Christian, were involved and implicated in the widespread carnage. As their friends and neighbors watched, the perpetrators looted and wrecked Jewish homes and businesses, torched hundreds of synagogues while intentionally inactive fire brigades stood by, desecrated cemeteries, killed scores of Jews, and terrorized virtually every Jew in the Third Reich. In the aftermath, some thirty thousand Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps at Dachau, Buchenwald, and Sachsenhausen. The November pogroms of 1938 showed that no Jew could ever expect to live a normal life in Nazi Germany.

[2] See Genesis 1-2, 11-25, and Leviticus 19:18.

[3] See Berachot 28b.

[4] For insightful discussion of the significance of the Torah ark at USHMM, one that helped to inform the reflections here, see Henry F. Knight, "Before Whom Do We Stand?" *Shofar* 28, no. 3 (Spring 2010): 116-34. One of the contributors to *Encountering the Stranger*, Knight particularly called attention to the Torah ark at USHMM when our trialogue took place there.

[5] For a sampling of recent books and websites devoted to Jewish-Christian-Muslim trialogue see the bibliography in *Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue*, ed. Leonard Grob and John K. Roth (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 263-66.

# Post-Dialogue, or After-Silence at the Holocaust Museum

## By Rachel Baum

*There is pre-dialogue, our slow or feverish preparation for dialogue. Without any idea of how it will proceed, which form it will take, without being able to explain it, we are convinced in advance that the dialogue has already begun: a silent dialogue with an absent partner.*

*Then afterwards, there is post-dialogue or after-silence. For what we manage to say to the other in our exchange of words—says virtually nothing but this silence, silence on which we are thrown back by any unfathomable, self-centered word whose depth we vainly try to sound.*

*Then finally there is what could have been the actual dialogue, vital, irreplaceable but which, alas, does not take place: it begins the very moment we take leave of one another and return to our solitudes.*

Edmond Jabès[1]

It is, to many of us, obvious that dialogue is a necessary response to the Holocaust. We need dialogue, need the common ground that makes dialogue possible. We know all too well what happens when human beings become disconnected from each other, and how people with whom we do not speak can become dehumanized. Dialogue is not the single answer to the world's problems, but it is hard to imagine our finding our way to any sort of solutions without it.

Yet for those of us who engage in interreligious dialogue, it is not always clear what dialogue *is*. We think of dialogue as involving words, and yet good dialogues involve a great deal of listening. When we listen, we have to attend both to what is said, and what is unsaid. Dialogue is inextricably connected to silence.

The Holocaust, one of the most well-researched events in modern history, is a subject surrounded by silence. With everything we know, there is still so much that we cannot know. Learning about the Holocaust is, in part, a training to hear the silences. What stories do we not hear because the victims were routinely killed? What remains unspoken in a recounting of survivor experience?

When reflecting on the time I spent together at the Holocaust Museum with other Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars, I admit that I cannot remember all that was said. What I remember most is the experience of sharing silence together, held by the space of the museum. Although our conversations at the Museum were fruitful and important, what I remember most are the spaces in between. Those spaces were framed by our presence at the Holocaust Memorial Museum, whose walls hold such suffering. Although I have been to the museum many times, it was different to see it through the eyes of people who had never been there before. I don't remember our talking while we walked through the exhibit, although perhaps we did. What I remember most is simply the presence that we shared, the ability to be with each other in a vulnerable space.

What made that space vulnerable was not only the suffering of the victims, but what it meant for us to be in that space. We had come to the museum to work on a project that looked at

how our religious traditions deal with the Other – the stranger, the one who stands outside of the tradition. In our essays, some of us wrote of our religion's positive tradition of welcoming the stranger. Others wrote about ways in which our tradition could be read – should be read – in ways that would welcome the stranger.

At times I felt that our writing did not take enough risks. It is, after all, difficult to be vulnerable in academic writing. Yet experiencing the Holocaust museum together, there was not one of us who could say, with confidence, that our tradition had the answer, that our tradition could have alone stopped the Holocaust.

On the first day, one of the Muslim scholars talked about humility as a guard against religious triumphalism, which we all identified as a central barrier to interreligious dialogue. Religious humility is linked to vulnerability, because it identifies a limit to knowledge, to certainty. Being in the space of the museum reminded each of us that we need each other and that we are vulnerable to one other. Because we could be a victim, because we could be a perpetrator, because we could be a bystander, we are vulnerable and our religious traditions alone cannot protect us.

Since that time, I have tried to carry that vulnerable space into my classroom. Although the space of the museum offers a very specific opportunity, the walls of a Holocaust classroom define a space too, a space of vulnerability and openness for students who are confronting this subject, perhaps for the first time. Students who come with a well-defined religious viewpoint find that many of their beliefs feel insufficient in the shadow of the Shoah. Christian students who learn about the history of Christian anti-Judaism often experience a sense of loss as they struggle to reconcile their religious commitments with their new knowledge.

Indeed, interreligious dialogue often throws us back onto our own traditions. In our meeting at the Holocaust Museum, some of the most intense conversations were between members of the same faith tradition, rather than among the different faiths. In a certain sense, we are most vulnerable to those we feel closest to, because they have an ability to wound us in ways that outsiders may not.

In the Fall of 2013, in my course on "The Holocaust and the Politics of Memory," I had a Muslim student -- the first, I believe, in one of my Holocaust courses. The class was a vulnerable place for her, and I tried to hold that space open for her, to create a space where vulnerability could be met with vulnerability. We are all vulnerable in the shadow of the Holocaust, and part of my work as a teacher is to help students share that tenderness in the space of the classroom. Over time, as the community of the classroom grows, a shared sense of responsibility develops and students feel protective of each other.

By the end of the course, my student expressed her feelings of solitude, that she has important things to say about the Holocaust and the misuse of Holocaust memory, but she doesn't have a community in which to say it. She wants to tell her Muslim friends, but she worries that in her community, what she wants to say will put her outside.

I sent her a copy of *Encountering the Stranger*. It is not an entirely satisfying response, but I wanted her to know that she is not alone.

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[1] Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Dialogue*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 7.

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**Rachel N. Baum** is a senior lecturer in foreign languages and literature at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. Dr. Baum's research focuses on the emotions of post-Holocaust Jewish identity. She has published a number of essays, including chapters in *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, edited by Roger Simon, et al, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000); *After-Words: Post-Holocaust Struggles with Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Justice*, edited by John Roth and David Patterson, (University of Washington Press, 2004); and *Anguished Hope: Holocaust Scholars Confront the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, edited by John Roth and Leonard Grob (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008).

One of Dr. Baum's primary interests is interfaith dialogue. In 2007, she was an invited guest of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as a member of an interfaith group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars. The group's book Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish, Christian, Muslim Trialogue was published by the University of Washington Press. Dr. Baum's chapter is entitled, "Loving the Stranger: Intimacy between Jews and Non-Jews."

# Reflections on the Wroxton Gathering

## By Khaleel Mohammed

Most meetings on interfaith dialogue, whether they are held under the auspices of academic or confessional discourse, follow a certain format. The presenters are generally selected in a manner that will seek to ensure that they contribute to perceived harmony among the participants. This inevitably means that those who question certain cherished traditions will be ostracized. It also means that differences which are what foster the need for such dialogue will often be overlooked, and instead points of convergence, real or assumed, focused upon. Sometimes, participants may be apologists, in which case the sense of harmony precludes opposing any of their viewpoints; or they may be polemicists against their own religion, which endears them to a certain crowd. In either case, very little is actually accomplished on the level of widespread benefit, although individual friendships may be forged. And perhaps this is the reason why, after more than a decade of interfaith encounters through North America, spurred on by the horrific memory of 9/11, little has been achieved. The latest Pew polls show that relations between Jews, Christians and Muslims are still, while not acrimonious, certainly not indicative of a pluralist outlook. The focus of many states on banning Shariah law—something that no mainstream Muslim organization has ever solicited—indicates the result of negative "othering."

As a long-time participant in many interfaith meetings, at home and abroad, I have also noted that presenters often are more focused upon their own presentations rather than listening to what is said by others. As such, a common sight is that while a speaker is at the podium, her co-panelists, instead of listening attentively, can often be seen concentrating on tweaking their own notes that they will be presenting shortly. And thus, a meeting that is supposed to promote dialogue instead ends up being an exercise in public relations: everyone smiles, but none has really listened and digested what the other has to say. It is for this reason that when I was asked to contribute to a book on the subject, I titled my chapter , "The Art of Heeding," pressing my view that one should more focus on listening; the time for tweaking and preparing one's own presentation is before the meeting, not during its course.[1]

My experience at Wroxton Trialogue, held at the United States Holocaust Museum in October 2007, was to revitalize my efforts and change my negative attitude towards such gatherings. In the first place, the eighteen participants were drawn from diverse backgrounds, based on their education and academic credentials. As with almost all academics, even those from within the same tradition did not share the same viewpoints: indeed there were some who were vehemently opposed to each other's perspectives on several issues.

The focus on the presentations was decidedly against fostering any sort of apologetic: the title "Encountering the Stranger" forced participants to examine how their respective faiths dealt with the outsider. Given the acrimonious history between the three Abrahamic religions, this certainly was no easy task. And as if that were not enough, the wide variety of interpretations of any scriptural texts deemed relevant required a maximum of effective moderating in all sessions.

As if to ensure that presenters did not just speak, they were told that all of their material would be listened to, read and then their fellow presenters would direct questions that they would have to effectively address. The presentations and responses were published as *Encountering the*

*Stranger* by University of Washington Press in 2012, edited by Professors Leonard Grob and John Roth.

In my own presentation, for example, I reflected upon a "fatwa"—an authoritative opinion—rendered a few years ago in Saudi Arabia by its highest council of scholars that rejected the idea of pluralism. Since Saudi Arabia is predominantly Sunni, I also discussed the workings of a Shi'ite group that wanted to have one of contemporary Shi'ism's highest authorities, Ayatollah Sistani, order that the famous American professor, Abdul Aziz Sachedina be banned from the mosque pulpit because of some of his views. The thrust of my presentation was that none of us knows for certain that a particular spiritual path is the singularly correct one, and I used the shared story between the scriptures: of Abraham welcoming guests at Mamre, without checking to see if they shared his worldview. As such, I entitled my presentation "When certainty becomes immaterial"—the idea that harmonious human interaction takes precedence over considerations of religious truth.

After listening to my presentation, and reading my preliminary draft, my fellow presenters questioned me on a variety of topics. Among these was my contention that ethics, rather than theological perspective, should govern interfaith relations. My reference to the story of Lot and its oft-interpreted homophobia was questioned in terms of how it meshed with my views of ethics. And I was also questioned about Lot's protecting his guests at the possible price of his daughters' safety: did I see responsibility towards his guests as more important than his duty as a father to protect his children?

These questions, it will be noted, were based on a deep examination of what I actually said, forcing me to examine my views as a world citizen, and asked without any implication of malice. The selection of questioners was strategic: they came from different religions, chosen at random. This meant that any one presenter could be faced with questions that forced a thorough examination of values declared as representative of his/her religion.

The back and forth discussions that went on via email forced us to interact with each other as academics, as upholders of our particular faiths, and even as opponents of the views of our coreligionists in some cases. In the end, what we produced was a volume of what I consider truly enlightening essays. This set the paradigm for several other encounters. At the 40th Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust in 2010, a group of participants presented a summary of what we had learned at this conference.[2] And at the "Responsibility of World Religions in an Age of Genocide," conference in Aspen, Colorado, in June 2012, I asked that the paradigm of the Holocaust meeting be adopted for future interfaith gatherings.

Perhaps the greatest lesson I took from this conference concerned the idea that we all have to initially agree on anything. We do not have to sweep differences under the table. We have to acknowledge that differences do exist, and we may often have to acknowledge that they may not be solved in the foreseeable future. This acknowledgement is what forces us to draw upon the best of our respective spiritual backgrounds. For, while all the religious traditions have a history of interfaith and intrafaith acrimony, they also have ideals that promote a tolerable *modus vivendi*. In arranging interfaith gatherings, I am careful to ensure that the presenters are chosen to represent a realistic spectrum of their faith, and not only from those whose views agree with mine. Even in terms of being a university professor, I learned from the Wroxton gathering: for if a professor cannot relate to a student without getting angry when the latter expresses a viewpoint that is in opposition to the professor's, then the whole commitment to interfaith dialogue would seem just a meaningless façade. I am happy to say that in 2015, a group calling itself "The Foundation for Interfaith Understanding" is using the Wroxton gathering, and the book "Encountering the Stranger" as its model for future conferences.

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[1] "The Art of Heeding" in *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots,* ed. Rebecca Kratz-Mays. Ecumenical Press, PA., July 2008: 75-86. Initially published as a journal article, "The Art of Heeding," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43 (2), Spring 2008: 75-86.

[2] "Encountering the Stranger," 40th Annual Scholars Conference, St. Joseph's University, PA. March 8, 2010.

# The Persistent Challenge to Human Dignity

## By Beverly Eileen Mitchell

### The Nature of the Challenge

One of the most important lessons I believe we can learn from the Holocaust is that we must safeguard the dignity of every human being. Yet the persistent violations of this dignity at the hands of fellow human beings have been an omnipresent challenge many decades after the end of World War II. The well-known slogan "Never again" refers to the defiant affirmation from within the Jewish community that they will never allow another Holocaust. While there has been no repeat of the Holocaust in terms of the Jews, there have been other genocides, ethnic cleansings, and mass killings since the end of World War II. These crimes against humanity constitute a persistent challenge to the dignity and welfare of every human being. For those of us alarmed by these kinds of crimes, we have the responsibility to recognize, embrace and propagate the notion of the importance of safeguarding human dignity because of the bond we share as fellow human beings. Historically, an important step in the protection of human dignity is attentiveness to the presence of ideological thinking and/or propaganda in the public sphere that makes dehumanizing practices within society possible.

The ideology of racial antisemitism made the violation of the dignity of the Jews an acceptable practice, if not a patriotic duty in Nazi Germany. Under the charismatic leadership of Hitler, Germans were misled by pseudo-scientific inquiries and cultural ethnocentric assessments that transformed an already present religious antisemitism into a racial one. This more virulent expression of antisemitism enabled the Nazis to justify their resolution of the "Jewish problem," by the attempt to exterminate the Jewish population in Europe. Ironically, eradication of European Jewry was not enough, for in addition to the slaughter of 6 million Jews, another 5 million non-Jews met the same fate. The value and worth of these unfortunate ones were questioned and their right to exist adjudicated negatively. Deeply flawed fellow human beings determined that these people had less value as human beings, and were, therefore, dispensable. *Who is to say that at some point in time we, too, will not be subjected to the same determinations and assessments regarding our fitness to live?*

One important lesson we can draw from Martin Shaw's discussion of genocide is that the threat of genocide is present long before the gas chambers asphyxiate or the machetes slash.[1] Such an insight suggests that we must be ever vigilant to conditions, forces, and factors within our socio-political contexts that can sow the seeds of genocide, in order to prevent such crimes against humanity in the future. An ethical imperative to safeguard the dignity of every human being would make such vigilance paramount.

### The Nature of Human Dignity

When we think of human dignity we tend to do so with a view of human beings at their best: that is whole, highly capable, physically robust, intellectually sharp, and attractive without obvious blemishes. The far greater challenge in defining human dignity arises when we dare to look at actual human beings, under particular circumstances, in the presence of the degraded and the dehumanized. It is in those very acute places of degradation that we must dare to speak of the presence of human dignity, if we are to speak about dignity at all. To look deeply and theologically, we must accept the challenge of describing and defining dignity from the vantage point of the marginalized, rejected, and oppressed.[2] Viewing dignity from the "underside of history," leads us to contemplate whether or not dignity can be lost or taken away. This

perspective forces us into the deeper questions, such as: what makes and keeps us truly human; is our humanness predicated on our social status, physical condition, or intellectual capacity; to what degree do our natural endowments influence the presence or absence of dignity. We are led to ponder whether or not we are ever justified in treating others in certain ways based upon our fallible assessments of their value or worth.

As someone who approaches this from within the Christian tradition, my definition of human dignity is based upon the affirmation in Genesis 1:27 that God created the human in the divine image.[3] There are a number of important theological implications for what it means to be human based upon the simple assertion that the human was created in the image of the divine. The first implication is that a measure of glory comes to each human being insofar as s/he is created in the image of God. This "glory," that arises out of the imprint of the divine on every human creature, is human dignity. Second, because we bear the divine imprint, which imparts a measure of glory, human dignity is a divine grace. As such, it is an aspect of who we are as human beings which cannot be taken away from us by other human beings, for human beings do not have the power to give and take away divine grace. Even when we attempt to deny the presence of dignity in another, we violate but not destroy that dignity.[4] The inner cry of protest to this violation, whether we can hear it or not, testifies to the continuing presence of that dignity when the value and worth of another is threatened or even denied. Third, because of the gifted nature of human dignity and the human inability to destroy it, this dignity is present in every human being, regardless of race/ethnicity, age, sexual identity, religion, national origin, class, handicapping condition, or other features of diversity which we use to discriminate against others. This dignity remains regardless of our abilities, capabilities or disabilities. It is present at the beginning of life and remains at the end. If this theological baseline is used to establish the value and worth of every human being, then we must protect human dignity whenever it is jeopardized.

**Why the Need to Safeguard Human Dignity**

The persistent challenge for those who have the courage to embrace the ethical imperative to safeguard the dignity of all human beings is that we have the human tendency to manufacture differences or capitalize on the diversity within the human family to pit one group against the other. We strive to establish that one social group is superior and render other groups inferior. Economic, social, cultural, and political upheaval seems to make such occurrences inevitable. Hence, the tendency to problematize the existence of groups in our societies makes our vigilance necessary. It also makes it incumbent upon us to refuse to acquiesce to expressions of intolerance that place the dignity of others in jeopardy.

The propensity for humans to do evil and avoid the good vexes all who truly love justice and thirst for right relationships. Despite the fact that there are and will be those among us who, for various reasons, succumb to hatred and hostility toward others, those of us who can resist the human impulse to sow seeds of hatred must be willing to become "evangelists" for the protection of the value and worth of every human being, even of our enemies. Perhaps, worse than those who are caught up in ever increasing spirals of hatred and violence, are those who do not hate, but, nevertheless, stand by in silence and inaction toward the breaches of peaceful and just human interaction. In hindsight, our knowledge of the Holocaust during the 12 years of Nazi rule, illumines even more clearly the bitter truth of the old saying, often attributed to Edmund Burke, "*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing*."

The German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemoller articulated the tragedy of indifference when he penned the following poem, from the context of Nazism:

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out--*
*Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out--*
*Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out--*
*Because I was not a Jew.*

*Then they came for me--and there was no one left to speak for me.*[5]

In another context, at a different historical moment, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., also understood the moral harm perpetuated when those of good will fail to protect or defend those whose human dignity comes under assault, when he wrote,

> *We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be co-workers with God ...*[6]

Faithful to the prophetic ministry to which he was called, King sought to impress upon the so-called "good" people – [moderate, white?] clergymen, no less – that the time was *now* to do the heavy lifting of delivering the southern United States practice of the segregation of the African American out of the "quicksand of racial injustice" onto the "solid rock of human dignity,"[7]

The truth is that indifference and complacency are the enemies of justice because the pursuit of justice requires the passionate engagement of those who dare to care. When "good" people are unwilling to speak out for the vulnerable or intervene in the face of oppression or take risks on behalf of the socially crushed, then they are no longer "good."

**Recognition of our common humanity**

It is unfashionable in some academic circles, particularly in the area of contextual theology, to speak about a "common humanity," to avoid the transgression of hegemonic universalizing. However, as a practitioner of contextual theological reflection, I contend that there are issues within the global community that compel us to consider our common humanity, even as we engage in important, meaningful reflection from particular socio-historical contexts. (The *real* challenge is to perfect the dance between particularity and universality, not to deny the value and importance of considering either one in our discourse.)

As an African-American woman from the United States, one might raise the question as to why I feel a theo-political commitment to vigilance about the growth of antisemitism in Europe and other places. I could devote my energies for vigilance solely on the plight of African Americans who bear the scars and still carry the weight of the burden of the ideology of white supremacy on their shoulders. However, I know that the ideology of antisemitism, like the ideology of white supremacy, is an enemy of human dignity. None of us can afford to circumscribe our commitments to our own silos of concern. In a one-sided focus on contextual theologies, the universality within the particularity of one's socio-historical context can be obscured. In the need to redress the violation of the dignity of one's own community of belonging, one can lose sight of King's insight that, "*We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny*."[8] The truth of his observation is even more evident, geopolitically, in our time through globalization. While King's observation is certainly geopolitically true in our time, it has always been theologically true, for we are bound to each

other by the reality that we are all creatures made in the image of God. Hence, there is no room for ideologies, mindsets, or practices that insist that some groups are more human than others. There is no moral justification for attempts to deny the full humanity of any group in our societies. Those who are prepared to make a theo-political commitment to human dignity cannot afford to operate with tunnel vision within that commitment. If we truly recognize what is at stake, then we know that King was right when he said that, "*injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere*."[9]

Neither the much-admired poem of Niemoller nor the well-known aphorism attributed to Burke nor the famous quotations of King should ever be relegated to the category of pious-sounding platitudes, which can no longer inspire passionate commitment. These prophetic utterances retain their force because they get at the heart of what makes safeguarding the human dignity of every human being an ethical imperative: our *shared* humanness makes us siblings in the family of God. Recognizing our common humanity is the first step toward safeguarding the dignity that belongs to each one of us.

**Safeguarding Human Dignity**

Safeguarding human dignity is both an individual and communal act. I see four practices that we can adopt to safeguard the dignity of others. We can do so through: 1) making a theo-political commitment to protect human dignity; 2) exercising self-critical examination; 3) bearing witness; 4) maintaining vigilance against antisemitism; and 5) engaging in the practice of radical hospitality. I will briefly describe what these practices involve.

**A Theo-Political Commitment**

It takes a theological commitment to safeguard the dignity of fellow human beings. The grounding for the commitment to protect human dignity that can supersede our petty prejudices, relativize our limited perspectives, and transcend our egocentrism, requires a theological foundation that recognizes the value and worth of every human being as a gift of divine grace. An understanding of human origins which arises from a purposeful Creator, who stamps the divine imprimatur on each one of us, as we find in the Genesis narrative, captures not only the value and worth of each human being, but also underscores the nature of the bonds that ties us to each other. It can illumine the reality that we are enhanced or diminished to the degree that others are enhanced and diminished, and offers a powerful incentive for commitment to the well-being of others.

Safeguarding the dignity of fellow human beings also requires a political commitment. Our theological commitments with regard to our relationship to God and to fellow human beings determine our values. The economic, social, cultural, and political commitments we make arise from those values. Our values determine the way we treat others not only personally, but also collectively. What we truly value is reflected in the socio-political decisions we make and the policies, laws, and customs to which we submit. Whether we are weighing in on welfare reform, immigration, renewal of voting rights, or national healthcare reform, our decisions with regard to these issues reveal the degree to which we are committed to uphold the dignity of all or whether are concerns are limited to "me and mine." A *theo-politica*l commitment to human dignity is needed to help safeguard the dignity of all.

**Self-Critical Examination**

The major problem with ideologies such as antisemitism is that these ideologies constitute more than personal beliefs and attitudes. They tend to permeate the ethos of a society because they become imbedded in customs, laws, and public policies. Consequently, as members of society we imbibe that ethos even when we do not subscribe necessarily to the ideology that

informs it. This is why it is crucial for us to engage in periodic self-critical examination not only of ourselves as individuals, but also as members of various groups within our societies. Fortunately, we live in a time when people are somewhat embarrassed to be accused of being racist or antisemitic. This indicates that people at least find these labels repugnant, even if they have difficulty applying those labels to their own attitudes, beliefs, and conduct. The willingness and the courage to look within as well as without are indispensable in being attentive to the ways in which things we say and do can violate the dignity of other human beings.

**Bearing witness**

Bearing witness is re-telling the life stories of communities and it is an indispensable way of promoting regard for human dignity. Recounting history, telling younger generations about events such as the Holocaust, black slavery, the Rwandan genocide, the ethnic cleansings of Bosnia, the killing fields of Cambodia must be told often. The practice of bearing witness is on-going, for new generations emerge which are unfamiliar with the stories, and must hear them for the first time. Even those who have heard the stories need to hear them again. Moreover, it is not enough to tell or re-tell these events. We are also required to explore the causes and significance of them in order to discern the ways in which our current contexts exhibit some of the warning signs that we should address.

Undoubtedly, the practice of bearing witness will evoke resistance from those who resent the reminders. With respect to the Holocaust, there are people who want to minimize its tragedy and impact. Moreover, there are even some who contend that it never happened at all. Silence about the past and acquiescence to the psychological bullying that would lead us to consign the past to the past leaves us ill-equipped to address the ways in which antisemitism reasserts itself in subtler guises.

**Vigilance against Antisemitism**

Even when we are able to neutralize the prejudices we may harbor against certain groups within our own hearts, our responsibility does not end there. Our vigilance must include a refusal to acquiesce to attitudes and actions that foster and perpetuate the denial of human dignity within our families, work places, social interactions, and even the wider public sphere. Our tolerance of highly inflammatory, irresponsible political rhetoric that degrades targeted groups in our society leaves us all vulnerable to the perpetuation of an ethos of “us vs. them,” that fuels genocidal practices. If we are complacent within our socio-political contexts, we become bystanders in the public sphere. As bystanders, we merely observe and tolerate evil within our midst; and standby and do nothing. The lessons from the Holocaust should make it clear that we cannot afford to maintain the status of bystanders.

**The Practice of Radical Hospitality**

Safeguarding the dignity of fellow human beings is proactive. Even as we examine ourselves, remaining vigilant within the socio-political realm, more is required of us. The practice of radical hospitality exemplifies that proactivity; especially when extended toward those who are different from us. Hospitality – opening ourselves to others, welcoming them into our metaphorical and actual borders – expressed our commitments to human dignity in concrete terms. It also renders us vulnerable and takes us out of comfort zones that shelter us from getting to know others for who they are and not for how we project them to be. Radical hospitality, which stretches the bonds of mutuality and reciprocity, changes who we think we are and leads to the transgression of false boundaries. This spiritual practice of inclusion has the power to illumine just how deep our theological ties are to each other and makes our mission to safeguard the dignity of others just that much more rewarding.

**Conclusion**

These suggested practices for safeguarding the dignity of all human beings are by no means exhaustive of the ways in which we can defend the dignity of others. Although this discussion has articulated a response to the challenge from a Christian perspective, I contend that communities of faith from other religious traditions, which share the same concern for human dignity, can and should consider their own theological responses to the challenge to human dignity. Even as we hold diverse beliefs about the nature of the divine and may ritualize our beliefs in different ways, to the extent that we are willing to unite in the common goal of protecting human beings, we could make significant progress in rendering crimes against humanity as a thing of the past.

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[1] Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?* Cambridge, UK and Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2007.

[2] The category "the oppressed" is neither an ontological nor a static condition. I am very mindful that historical circumstances may change. Those oppressed in one context may place themselves in the position of being "the oppressor" in another.

[3] I address the topic of human dignity at length in *Plantations and Death Camps, Religion, Ideology, and Human Dignity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.

[4] Of course, violations of human dignity permeate our collective existence and happen all the time. Nevertheless, these violations do not destroy it.

[5] Quoted from http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007392, *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, "Martin Niemoller: 'First They came for the Socialists…'" accessed 2/22/14. Controversy surrounds not only where the poem was first quoted by Niemoller; but also the differing versions of the poem, e.g., which groups were listed and in what order.

[6] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," in *I Have A Dream, Writings and Speeches that Changed the World*, ed. by James M. Washington. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992, 92. King's famous letter, penned in 1963 while he was jailed for participating in civil rights demonstrations, was written in response to "liberal," "moderate" white clergy who had published an open letter criticizing those nonviolent demonstrations for fear that the resistance of blacks to segregation would incite civil disturbances.

[7] King, *I Have A Dream*, p. 92.

[8] Ibid, 85.

[9] Ibid.

# Post-Holocaust Christian Theology and Its Implications for Multireligious Conversations: A Roundtable Discussion

**Moderator:** Victoria Barnett

**Participants:**

Robert Cathey (Professor of Theology, McCormick Theological Seminary)

Katharina von Kellenbach (Professor of Religious Studies, St. Mary's College of Maryland)

Paul Knitter (Emeritus Paul Tillich Professor of Theology & World Religions, Union Theological Seminary, New York)

Esther Menn (Dean and Vice President for Academic Affairs and Ralph W. and Marilyn R. Klein Professor of Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago)

Fr. John Pawlikowski (Catholic Theological Union)

Elena Procario-Foley (Chair, Religious Studies Department and Driscoll Professor of Jewish-Catholic Studies, Iona College)

Karla Suomala (Professor of Religion, Luther College)

**Introduction (by Victoria Barnett, moderator)**

Narrowly defined, "post-Holocaust theology" refers to the theological body of literature (much of it written in the three decades immediately following the Holocaust) that used this historical event as a point of departure to re-examine the Jewish-Christian relationship as well as theological and ethical issues, such as complicity, antisemitism, theodicy and forgiveness, that posed particular challenges in the Holocaust's wake.[1] In the ensuing years, the very nature of the Holocaust as a historical and international event has necessarily broadened the scope of theological reflection, and new historiography on the role of the churches and other religious groups continues to raise troubling questions.

I would contend that post-Holocaust theology should be more broadly understood in terms of three central aspects of this history with respect to the role played by religious leaders and institutions during the Holocaust. The first concerns the historical and theological role played by the Christian teachings about the Jewish people and Judaism that helped lay the foundation for what happened in the Holocaust. The second is the historical role not just of the Christian churches, but of other religious groups, including international interfaith organizations and ecumenical bodies, during the Holocaust. The third concerns the questions and challenges that arise in the wake of the Holocaust particularly, but not only, for Christianity. In other words, post-Holocaust theology, which in its early decades focused understandably on the particulars of that event and what was known at the time, might be a useful body of literature for contemporary scholars who are grappling theologically and historically with

interreligious conflict, genocide, memorialization, issues of religion, incitement, and violence, and a host of other challenges.

The participants in this roundtable conversation are theologians and professors who have been engaged in these issues for many years, often in interreligious contexts. This conversation was recorded on March 29, 2014. The participants have been allowed to edit and expand on their remarks.

**Victoria Barnett:** My opening question is this: as Christian scholars who have been engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue and wider interfaith discussions, has the Holocaust and post-Holocaust theology had an influence on your work and your engagement? Has it been central in your own work, or has it been more marginal? And what has been your experience in teaching the Holocaust, either as a course in its own right or as part of a larger course?

**John Pawlikowski**: I consider the Holocaust very important. Both in terms of the history of Christian theology as a force for social relations, and then I think theologically, not just in isolation but in its impact. Certainly we can see how the whole history of antisemitism prepared the ground for the kind of denigration of Jews and Judaism that was central to the "success" of the Nazi effort. I certainly am a person who does not draw a simple straight line from classical antisemitism to the Holocaust. I think there were many factors that brought about the rise of Nazism. But on the grassroots level, particularly, and in the attitude of people, whether that attitude was outright collaboration with the Nazis or just indifference leading to "bystanding," I think traditional Christian theology played a role. Even, interestingly, in a place like Poland, where the Żegota movement tried to save Jewish children … some of the people who founded Żegota really believed in the Zionist movement, not so much because they believed in Zionism, but because they felt it was a more humane answer for the purification of Poland.

**Victoria Barnett**: How has the Holocaust shaped your own work over the decades?

**John Pawlikowski**: Well, it's been very influential, first of all, because I teach a course on a regular basis on Holocaust, genocide and the ethical implications. So as someone who works in the field of social ethics I find the Holocaust extremely important, as well as other genocides, for a discussion of contemporary ethics. I think also for me one of the places where the Holocaust has played a very important role is the way I try to struggle with the God question after the Holocaust. What does it mean today to say that God somehow has a role in directing the course of history or the course of human civilization, in light of the Holocaust? I mean Irving Greenberg's[2] question: did God abandon the covenant?

**Elena Procario-Foley:** I would echo what John said, except that I'm not a social ethicist, but I think that questions of theological anthropology are very different in a post-Holocaust key. As far as teaching, I've been teaching a study abroad course about Christianity and the Holocaust at Auschwitz for the past five years. The way into the subject of the Holocaust for me is through questions of classical Christian anti-Judaism and Christian responsibility in that regard. So I think it's very important to look at theology in that way.

**Victoria Barnett**: How have your students wrestled with this over the years? Is this something that grabs them? What aspects of it affect them?

**Elena Procario-Foley:** Their understanding of Christian theology is a little bit thin. If they know the biblical phrase "God is love" they're not quite sure exactly what that means, so to present them with questions of Christian anti-Judaism is shocking and very, very disturbing to

them, most of them. (I've had) students kind of in tears: "I thought this was a God of love. How could we do this?" and others outright rejecting that anything I said about Christian anti-Judaism was true, but they're another story. Mostly it affects them so that they want to know more, and they actually learn more about their own tradition that way and are motivated to teach others to understand the difficult aspects of their tradition's history so that they can live the tradition in a better, more authentic manner.

**Esther Menn:** What about in biblical studies? I don't know if in the United States, in our context, it's directly related to the post-Holocaust (issue) or whether it's because we have a larger Jewish population, but biblical studies has really been impacted. Instead of the "Old Testament" and "New Testament" we start talking about the "Hebrew Bible" and even the "Jewish New Testament," and we have Jewish scholars and Christian scholars talking about the same materials from different methods-- historical, critical, literary. Midrash and Jewish interpretation has come to the fore and is beginning to be better known. Inter-Testamental literature is called Second Temple Literature, and we know that Second Temple Judaism was a vibrant and multi-faceted phenomenon. That's very different from what we used to think about the Persian period and the Hellenistic period as a kind of decay, and what may be called the traditional Christian, anti-Jewish arc—Judaism's sort of "failure." It's just a very different framework now, especially the last thirty years or so.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** In my case it's being a second generation German. The Holocaust actually brought me into theology as a place to explore questions of "why" and "how." It was the one place within the German school system where we could engage these questions. And since I grew up in Germany and had never met any Jews as a consequence of the Holocaust, when I came to the United States the first issue that I needed to work through was why I had certain assumptions about Jews and whether what I thought I knew about Jews and Judaism, was in fact real or antisemitic. So I wrote my dissertation on anti-Judaism and I tried to define anti-Judaism and to learn to distinguish between who Jews were and who I thought they were on the basis of my Christian upbringing and theological education. My interest in Jewish-Christian dialogue and anti-Judaism led me back to the Holocaust. As the only German in the room in Jewish-Christian dialogue in America, I was forced to respond to German and Christian responsibility for the Holocaust, and with an urgency that American Christians didn't. The perpetrators of the Holocaust were German but also baptized Christians, even though some of them renounced their church membership. So I became interested in family history and the ideology and experience of perpetrators.

**Robert Cathey:** For me, teaching in a seminary related to the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Barmen Declaration[3] is one of our confessional documents, and that's always kind of an open door to teaching our students about the Holocaust, taking them to the Illinois Holocaust Museum just outside Chicago and introducing them to some figures, one of whom most of them know—Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his story—but also Reinhold Niebuhr and his awareness of the nazification process, and then Karl Barth. Both are theological figures I've taught about, so it's in a sense doing historical theology but then re-reading those documents from a post-Holocaust perspective. So one of the things we introduce students to is that the Barmen Declaration did not raise a protest against what the Nazi government was doing to the Jews and looking at why that was the case, even though people celebrated the Barmen Declaration as a document of resistance.

**Paul Knitter:** I'm not a scholar of the Holocaust or post-Holocaust theology or of Jewish-Christian dialogue. My area has been the broader dialogue of Christianity with other religions. But certainly the reality of the Holocaust and the theologies that have developed within the churches and the academies in response to the Holocaust have played a crucial role in my work. From the start I've tried to look at the consequences—the very dangerous consequences—that can result when any religion (especially my own Christian religion) claims that it is meant to replace or fulfill all other religions. Such claims, I have tried to show, make dialogue very, very difficult, if not impossible. How can you enter into a dialogical relationship with another person or another religion and expect to learn anything when you are convinced that you've got the full, the final, the absolute truth? How will you look on the other religion? How will you treat the other religion? For me, the Holocaust stands as the clearest and most horrendous answer to that question. It illustrates what can happen when one religion believes that God wants it to replace another religion. I'm not saying that claims of possessing the only or the final truth must lead to things like the Holocaust. But I am saying that these claims make things like the Holocaust so much more possible… And they are especially possible when a religion that makes absolute claims becomes the majority religion, that is, when it is the dominant religion in a political system that has economic or military strength. When you put these two realities together – that is, absolute religious claims and the political power to enforce them—you have a lethal situation, such as the Holocaust. So absolute claims to have the one and only truth, or the truth meant to swallow up all other truths, not only prevent dialogue; they cause death.

**John Pawlikowski:** If I could interject one other idea here, following up on this point: I think one of the impacts in theology is in fact what I would call in quotation marks "Nazi theology." Because Nazi theology clearly said that Nazi leadership had assumed the role that God played in previous ideologies. They (i.e., the Nazis) became the ultimate arbiters of who was fit to live and who had to die for the advancement of humanity. While it was not a religion per se, it acted like a religion in a very profound fashion, and led to massive human destruction. So I think we have to learn from this, and I've tried to learn as an officiant from this, how easy it is for certain ideologies of human destruction to penetrate into social acceptability. One of the concerns I would have right now is what's happening in Africa with gay people, which is also a concern from the Holocaust since gays were among the victims. You know that gays are being defined as fundamentally not equal human persons, and in some cases the churches have embraced these new secular laws in places like Uganda, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic. I saw a bishop on France 24 (the international French television network) telling his newly ordained priests about the evils of gay people and how they're not equal and so on. This is reprehensible to me and I am glad that certain African Catholics, including the head of the Pontifical Peace and Justice Commission Cardinal Turkson, who is a Ghanaian, stood up and criticized the embrace of this kind of legislation by Catholic leaders. I applaud him for this as well as the Archbishop of Dublin, who has also issued a statement condemning this kind of legislation.

**Karla Suomala:** It's a really interesting question. I have come to post-Holocaust theology late but have learned a great deal in the last few years. My first introduction to Judaism in a serious way was in Israel. My second was at a Jewish institution where I did my Ph.D., so I was largely formed within these Jewish contexts and the idea of post-Holocaust theology never came up and it was not part of our conversation. The whole idea of theology is still perceived as a significantly Christian enterprise, so it didn't strike me as having a lot of importance until I became part of the Christian Scholars Group. Then I started learning and reading more the longer I've taught Judaism and I've tried to integrate some of this into my coursework in terms of theological

aspects. Working with students in post-Holocaust theology has been moderately successful. It's very complicated. First of all, you have to introduce the idea of theology itself and sometimes it feels a little bit manipulative because my students don't have a grasp of theology to begin with, and then when they have post-Holocaust theology they're not in a very good place to argue back, because it can be shaming. How could they possibly argue against this? First of all, "I don't know anything", they say, and second, "How can I say anything when this has happened to these people?" So they're at a real disadvantage. I've worked with students once they've had some theology courses and Jewish studies courses that I teach, and then in independent studies, and this has been much more successful. But in general I feel that they need more tools so that they can actually interact with the material on their own terms and actually be able to be in conversation with it, as opposed to only feeling this deep guilt. I don't know that that is productive because then all they do is associate Judaism with shame, which is the last thing that I want them to do. So it's been kind of an interesting trajectory and I'm still wrestling with the kinds of pieces they need to deal with it in a productive way.

**Victoria Barnett**: Let me just ask, because all of you have been involved in some sense in Jewish-Christian dialogue or broader interfaith dialogues: how important is this body of material, the post-Holocaust theology that is out there in the various books and the literature? How important is it for your interfaith conversations? Has it shaped you? What kind of role has it played—or has it played a role at all? Has this played a role in your Jewish-Christian conversations; when you as a Christian engage in interfaith dialogue with Jews, is the Holocaust relevant? Did it play a role twenty years ago that it doesn't play today?

**John Pawlikowski:** On the contrary, I think it's the reverse. It didn't play a role in the early days. As one who entered the post-Nostra Aetate Christian-Jewish dialogue fairly early, it wasn't on the agenda, it wasn't on the Jewish agenda. The first major conference took place in 1974 at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City and this led to a whole series of conferences at universities around the country.

**Victoria Barnett**: Was this the Littell Conference [NB: The Annual Scholars Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches, co-founded by Franklin Littell]?

**John Pawlikowski:** With Franklin Littell, and I think that brought certain things to consciousness, but for me where it's relevant is that indeed it opens that door to all the major challenges of what I would call modernity. The loss of the influence of biblical scholarship, the greater sense of autonomy, the technological, the enhanced technological capacity to destroy—all these are central issues for humanity, and therefore they also must be central issues for the people engaged in Christian-Jewish dialogue. In that sense, theology and theological discussions in the Christian-Jewish dialogue cannot just be ethereal, they really have to be related to the consequences of theology in human society today, or the lack of theology.

**Victoria Barnett**: This is an interesting question though, because Krister Stendahl, Paul van Buren, and James Parkes—these were people who wrote and began to produce before *Nostra Aetate*, so there were people thinking about this. But what you're saying in a way is that it wasn't until Holocaust history became better known that people began really talking about it. Is that—would that be accurate do you think?

**John Pawlikowski:** But there was also—the problem, if I can put it this way, is that there was also positive resistance within the Jewish academic community to the theologizing of the Holocaust. The classic example is David Hartman, who said "I will mourn the Holocaust and its

victims all day long, but I am not building contemporary Jewish theology on the Holocaust, it has to be built on the covenant." Frankly, I think that's somewhat naïve, but that's what his view was.

**Karla Suomala:** That is exactly my experience, but it wasn't on the covenant because I wasn't in those circles, it was on the state of Israel. That is what our focus was. So the Holocaust was always there, but in many ways it had the kind of configuration that Yad Vashem in Israel does—you go through it up onto this balcony overlooking the land, the land is always there, so my whole experience was always framed by the land and the state of Israel. The Holocaust is a reality but it's not the final reality—you have to talk about Israel.

**Victoria Barnett**: Is that true for other people?

**Esther Menn:** I would say that in light of the Holocaust, in knowing what our texts and our traditions can do now, which was so horrifically made clear—for example, some of the statements in the New Testament that seem to lead to a demonization of Jews—we have a more critical stance now toward our own texts, at least we should, also to figures such as Martin Luther. Speaking as a Lutheran: we have the 1994 ELCA Declaration to the Jewish community that repudiates his anti-Jewish statements and expresses repentance and a commitment to live in a loving and positive religion. So I think we have a more critical perspective on our own texts and our own history, which is an important new beginning.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** I also think there are stages … beginning with survivor literature and powerful literary voices such as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, … then came the primary documentation by historians, such as Yehuda Bauer and Lucy Dawidowicz and only recently has the particular historical role of the churches came under investigation. It was historians who forced the churches to question the dominant narrative, which had cast the churches, first and foremost, as victims and resisters of secular National Socialism. This narrative had allowed church leaders to claim the moral capital to help rebuild the moral and cultural infrastructure of Germany after the war. But this narrative in both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches was challenged in the mid-1980s, when historians began to take a closer look at the churches' silence and complicity, particularly with respect to the persecution and murder of Jews. These new histories of the churches reaffirmed the need to recognize the deep roots of anti-Judaism in Christian theology.

**Victoria Barnett**: But you've got *Nostra Aetate* in the 1960s, you have the Episcopal repudiation of the deicide charge in the 1960s—these are things that predate that [more critical historiography]. So where do they come from? I agree with you that in the historical scholarship the critical examination of the churches came late, and you can certainly see how the Littell conferences began to shape people. But there does seem to be a theological shift that began earlier. So was it just that there were these few people who were writing about this stuff earlier?

**Elena Procario-Foley:** That's what I was going to say. I don't know the history of those writers enough. Certainly we are all thankful for John Connelly's work,[4] which has sketched out this thicker description, shall we say, of the preparation for [Nostra Aetate]. His book was specifically about Catholic teaching and of course we have Seelisberg before that. But I do think that the shock of the Shoah caused far more people to start looking at these issues and to have to look at what's been called so often "the shadow on the cross," and how that played into what John Pawlikowski said when the conversation started, into different people's positions … [the fact that] that there's some sort of sense of "oh well, this is just a consequence of stubbornness

or giving up the covenant," as in the book *The Holocaust Kingdom* when Alexander Donat relates his walking back from Germany to Warsaw and hearing Catholic Poles saying "oh well, we thought Hitler had at least taken care of that problem for us." You know, I think that's really significant … I think Poland's a really instructive example. John Pawlikowski knows far more than I do, but post-communist Poland shows this kind of split. Only then could Poland begin to deal with its legacy in terms of Christian anti-Judaism, because the narrative for them was that … for Christian Poles this was "our tragedy, and we were the ones who were hurt." … Then to begin to understand really what happened in the Holocaust and what happened on Polish land through the German death camps so that whole Polish-Jewish dialogue begins. The stages are important. I think the understanding of the teaching of contempt in that history only gets integrated at a real level [in the post-communist period] so that at least in that particular cultural context the conversation of post-Holocaust theology becomes very possible.

**John Pawlikowsi:** Well, part of the problem in the countries in the eastern bloc, especially maybe Poland, was that the Communist government, while it certainly began to acknowledge the Holocaust and build up the memorial sites, did so as an element of their own ideological perspective: that basically this [i.e., the Holocaust] was due to fascism and … the description of what happened in those camps kind of stripped Jewish identity from the victims. Because if you went to Auschwitz-Birkenau prior to the change in government, you had the national buildings, and they would say "Ten thousand Belgians were killed." Well, 95% of them were Jews, but there was no [acknowledgment of that]. At the end they put up a Jewish building, which was hardly open except when a group of Jews came to visit from America. But you know, you can say that was all wrong and stupid or something, however it influenced an awful lot of kids, students who used to travel to Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of their education, and they didn't really have the ability to question that at all. Certainly the church wasn't in a strong position to challenge it, frankly, because the church's ability in the communist era to educate was minimal. There were no schools, the only kind of education they could do would be inside the church.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** You know, the word "shock" is very revealing because it's somewhat unpredictable who was shocked at a particular point in time. There were some people who were shocked immediately in 1945, and there were other people who were shocked in the fifties or in the sixties or in the eighties, even within one community. So the knowledge was kind of there but whether or not a person was "shocked" by it depended on a variety of personal and political factors…

**John Pawlikowski:** Just to follow up on your point, the liberators are an interesting example of that. When the Holocaust Museum (prior to its existence actually, when there were just a council while the Museum was still in construction) sponsored a program, a conference on liberators—it was the first time that many of these liberators had ever told their story. They never told their wives, they never told their children about it and so this quickly related, and for many of them this was very cathartic. This was the first time that they actually were able to tell their story. A very interesting connection occurred and that is with the situation that developed a decade or so ago in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, where neo-Nazis tried to take over the town and the mayor mobilized the religious community. It was vicious—I mean, the Catholic church was burned down, the pastor suffered a nervous breakdown … We brought the mayor to the Holocaust Museum to honor him for this and he revealed only then that the reason he did this was because he had been a liberator. He had gone into a camp two days after the end of World War II, and he said "On my watch as mayor, not even the beginning of something like this is going to occur if I can possibly stop it."

**Victoria Barnett**: I really feel, working at the Museum, that I've seen this history change people, including people who are not Christian or Jewish, people who come from parts of the world where this is European history, it's not their history. So I don't know if people want to comment on that. The question I had as my next question was: are there elements of this history of post-Holocaust theology, of the Jewish-Christian conversation, that can be generalized to other interfaith conversations, or is this just a Jewish-Christian thing? And if there are things you could generalize or expand, what would they be?

**Robert Cathey:** Well, one place this has come up in my teaching in a Presbyterian context is that our denomination has been scrutinizing all our investments for the past ten years, and in the debate that has swirled around that, some of the rhetoric that has been used has recycled some of the anti-Judaic tropes. So one of the things I have done with students is to introduce them to that debate, but also back to the 1930s and to look at who were the theologians, who were the Protestant theologians in Germany who actually thought that Nazism was a good idea, and how did they theologically rationalize that and how did that impact even debates over issues like natural theology between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. You can read that debate from 1933 on a kind of pure theological methodological level, but if you look politically at what was going on, and why Barth has this very angry protest against natural theology, in an indirect way he's responding to the *Deutsche Christen*, who were arguing that there was this other revelation in their history and their conscience that said Hitler is the person who will redeem Germany. When students become aware of these connections between ancient disputes, or in this case disputes in the 1930s, and the theological issues today, they begin to see that it's not just history but is also part of the legacy of the past, where the structures we have in talking about religious "others" can be put into operation in terms of contemporary conflicts in very negative ways that make dialogue extremely difficult. That's kind of a revelation to some of my students because they assume "Well, Protestants, Presbyterians, we're not anti-Jewish, we're not antisemitic today" and yet for them to discover that some of the ways we talk about contemporary phenomena like the contemporary nation state of Israel, some of the rhetoric around that, recycles ancient tropes that have been around for many, many centuries in Christianity… Jews are aware of that, but often Protestants are not.

**Karla Suomala:** When you asked whether elements of the Holocaust could be generalized, I realized that the post-Holocaust theology that I have in mind, and the only stuff that I am familiar with, is Jewish. And the overwhelming emphasis of post-Holocaust Jewish theology is on this event being unique; you can't generalize it. That's almost always the opening statement. You can't generalize it and you can't find meaning in it. This is somewhat different to the Christian approaches to this. When I teach, it's in a Jewish studies context, which is where I see my role. Before they read anything Christian, I have them say "what do Jews say about this, in terms of what they think?" But in those settings where they say this is unique, don't compare.

**Victoria Barnett**: Have you yourselves rethought certain things as a result both of your interfaith conversations and knowing something about the Holocaust?

**Elena Procario-Foley:** I think Metz's[5] statement—that you can't do theology with your back to Auschwitz—is something that has not been taken seriously enough by enough Christian theologians. All good people doing all sorts of good work aren't antisemitic, but in the theological sense [they] don't necessarily realize that they are continuing to do their theology outside of this context, and that perhaps in lesser ways, outside of the rhetoric around Israeli politics that Bob mentioned, their theology still ends up tilting a little bit too far into these

supersessionist modes. As Paul [Knitter] said, the idea that "it's only this way" has dangerous consequences. So people seem to be satisfied when they can say, "oh, okay our academic organization has a subgroup on Jewish-Christian relations, we've taken care of that." But the fact that this subgroup exists and is supposed to have an effect on the rest of what's going on in those other sections of the organization is not necessarily a conscious connection that happens regularly. So I think it has to affect all areas of systematic theology, particularly theological anthropology, notions of salvation, and theodicy. So I think if we're serious about it we have to keep this in mind all the time and it's hard, it's hard work. It's not how most of us were trained but now at least there are programs teaching explicitly from the perspective of interreligious dialogue.

**Victoria Barnett**: And if you keep this in mind—the changes you're thinking of as a Christian—does that lead you to enter a conversation with a Muslim differently?

**Paul Knitter:** Well, yes. As you pointed out, Karla, if we say we really want to respect the uniqueness, the distinctiveness of the Shoah—that is, what it was and is and means for our Jewish brothers and sisters—then we're going to have to listen, really listen, when our Jewish (or Muslim) friends tell us: "look at what your theology has allowed; look at what it has allowed to be done to us; be mindful of this." But I've heard, dare I say, essentially the same message … from Native Americans: "look at what your theology and your missionaries have done to our culture." This is the message that we continue to hear from the postcolonial studies: this same dynamic of cultural disrespect and domination is taking place. So … this goes back to your earlier question about how the Holocaust affects my conversation with Jews and the Jewish-Christian dialogue. My first experience with Jewish-Christian dialogue was in Len Swidler's[6] trialogue group. I think this group began to meet back at the end of the 1980s or early 1990s or even earlier. I still remember my first experience in the group, where I came on with my theology of religions—"Let's sit down and we're all going to listen to each other; do know that I'm aware of my claim to superiority and I'll keep them in check, don't you worry." And David Blumenthal[7] said: "I don't trust you, I don't trust you." "What do you mean you don't trust me? I'm sincere," I retorted. "Yes, I know you're sincere, but look at what you've done to us in the past; look at why it is so difficult for us to trust you." He was speaking out of his Holocaust experience; that was my first experience of it. Since then, I've grown much more aware of how my traditional Christian language sounds to others, the language I use at liturgies, the language we heard from John's Gospel at Mass today, where John's doing another job on the Pharisees. I'm just so aware of how that sounds now. I just wish that Christians could have multiple occasions where they could be in a room where they are using their Christian language and then have Hindus or Buddhists or Jews right there listening to what's been said.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** I think that Holocaust theology is maybe generalizable, but it's actually the other instances of mass violence that don't lend themselves to the same deep theological analyses that the Holocaust does. There is something unique about the Holocaust that can't be replicated in other ways. Let me just say that as a chair of the Religion, Holocaust and Genocide Studies group at the American Academy of Religion, we tried very hard to organize panels that included other genocides: Native American, Rwanda, Cambodia. But we were often not successful because genocides other than the Holocaust do not generate the same kind of theological response or reflection.

**John Pawlikowski:** The Armenian genocide does.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** The Armenian [genocide]; there is some response there, yes.

**Paul Knitter:** So is it a question of degree?

**Katharina von Kellenbach**: I think it's because the Holocaust goes to the heart of Christian message, the heart of Christendom, Western Christendom. What we say about Jews in the Gospel of John, in our sacred texts, we do not say about Indians or Rwandans.

**John Pawlikowski:** I see.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** So whatever messages of hate are out there, they are not part of the sacred fabric. This makes the Holocaust theologically a different kind of challenge from any other, even though those instances of genocide or mass violence are horrific.

**John Pawlikowski:** Yes I agree with you about 75%. Because I think, for example, that in Rwanda, the role of the church in creating a sense of societal superiority on the part of one group—which then was the cause of the genocide against the other—the church bears some responsibility there. Now it isn't the same kind of explicit theology that we had relative to the Jews, but there is a certain theological—

**Paul Knitter:** It's the same dynamic.

**John Pawlikowski:** It's more like [David] Nirenberg[8] saying that while there may not be explicit anti-Judaism in this or that society, there's a kind of structure that is implanted in the culture and I think you can make the case in Rwanda that there was some involvement there and I mean from—

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** Of anti-Judaism?

**John Pawlikowski:** Not anti-Judaism, no, but a social theological involvement that accepted the notion of certain superiority among a particular group. I mean, the church was very instrumental, along with the Belgian government, in creating a social situation in which there was real stratification, in which one part of the society was put at the very top. I mean it even went down to the recruitment of students for the priesthood and all that kind of thing—who could go into seminary and from what tribe, what ethnic group and so on. Myself, though, on this question: it [i.e., the Holocaust] affects my ecclesiological definition but I would extend that to say that it ought to affect the basic fundamental identity of any religion, and that is that any religion that does not put human rights at the center of self-identity is a religion that is in trouble and a religion that is potentially a force for hatred and destruction in society. This is what I see happening now in these African [churches]. I'm so concerned, I spoke about this in Los Angeles a couple weeks ago and someone came up to me and asked: "are you promoting gay marriage?" I said I'm not addressing that question, what I am promoting is the basic recognition of human dignity, you cannot say that people are inferior. But for me it also raises the question, and this is even more controversial on the Christian side: are in fact efforts at evangelization a soft form of genocide? As my friend David Sandmel[9] says—David has said that that you know, when you look at it, if it were successful it would eliminate the Jewish community.

**Paul Knitter:** That's the intent.

**John Pawlikowski:** But talk about a hot issue in Christian circles right now, if you question evangelization…

**Paul Knitter:** So even when you look towards Native American religion and culture? Certainly, of course, they're not mentioned in the scriptures as the Jews are, and so there is that crucial

difference and I'm not sufficiently aware of that. Yet the attitude toward the religion, toward the Native Americans, was that they were of no value, that they were despicable, and this led to what we did in terms of trying to de-culturize them, trying to steal their children…

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** Yes, there's anti-paganism, anti-heathenism, and there's certainly enough hatred there, but it's still different. All I'm saying is that in terms of putting out a call for papers we did not get theologians or biblical scholars but historians, sociologists, anthropologists who are writing and working in these fields. There is very little theological reflection.

**Victoria Barnett**: So this brings me back to my question: if you had a class of undergraduate or graduate students from all different faiths, is there a reason why you would educate them about this history, not just so they would know this history, but because you hope you're giving them something useful and crucial theologically? As they go out into the world and confront their own ethical dilemmas, what would that [knowledge] be?

**Robert Cathey:** I don't have the historical confidence to do this, but the Illinois Holocaust Museum last spring hosted the first international conference on what they're now calling the Anatolian/Armenian/Assyrian genocide that started in the late 19th century and went into the 1920s. One of the stories that's told is that there were German diplomatic corps and military officers in Turkey when the genocide occurred, and they wrote reports back to Berlin about how this was carried out and there were officers that were horrified and asked should the German government do something. Well, the story that was told was that, before Poland was invaded Hitler said to his generals "kill as many people as you have to; who remembers the Armenians." So historically to compare what happened in the early 20th century in that region of the world and then the Holocaust could be very generative for a conversation between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the United States today. Not to take away from the uniqueness of the Holocaust, but there is this historical connection between [that and] what was known about how Turkey was rid of many of its Armenian Christians.

**Paul Knitter:** Didn't I read that Hitler also referred to the extermination of Native Americans as kind of an example?

**Victoria Barnett**: Well, he referred to the problems of racism in this country, I don't know if he said Native Americans, but he certainly said, "Who is America to tell us anything; look at what they're doing."

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** Sometimes I am afraid that teaching the Holocaust may have the unintended outcome of teaching the technologies of destruction. Are there ways in which the lessons of the Nazis have actually served to improve methods of oppression, domination, but also annihilation? By going through the Holocaust Museum, there's a way in which we also are desensitized and take for granted something that used to be unthinkable and is now thinkable and it has a name. Sometimes I'm quite worried by that.

**Elena Procario-Foley:** Moving directly from that, either apart from questions of uniqueness, or even saying it was unique: it doesn't mean that there aren't lessons to be learned. Some would say that it was unique because it was orchestrated, it was organized, it was engineered—I mean the Wannsee Conference—very consciously done. And certain people actually took delight in making towns "Judenrein" for Hitler … Premeditated mass murder as an expression of love and loyalty to a leader and his ideology is certainly something I want my students to consider. So it

happened as you just said, it could happen again, and that's a lesson to be taught, to reflect on what human dignity means, as John said. We haven't learned it very well, because we've had all these other horrific crimes as Katharina said before. I'm not comparing sufferings, but I think that the fact that we have not learned the lessons of the Holocaust is in itself a reason to talk about it in a multi-religious classroom, as you asked.

**John Pawlikowski:** Regarding Katharina's point about the theological connection: certain Roma historians argue, and I'm not that familiar with the literature, that in traditional Christian literature there is an anti-gypsy motif that played right into the selection of the Roma as victims under the rubric of social purification. Because you had basically two groups of victims, the victims who were victims because of their failure to provide political allegiance, but then you had those who were designated as in some way parasitical on society and polluting society, and certainly the Roma were in that category, not as bad as the Jews, but nonetheless they were in that category. I think it would be remiss not to include in this conversation what's happened very recently with post-Holocaust theology, and that is its elevation in the minds of certain people to a fundamental theology of injustice, [claiming] that in fact post-Holocaust theology contributes mightily to the injustice against the Palestinians. That motif is out there, primarily I would have to say in Protestant circles, I haven't seen much of it in Catholic theological circles, but it's certainly there at the World Council of Churches. Many of us ran into this at a conference that was organized by the WCC … where I myself and others were personally attacked on this score.

**Victoria Barnett**: Would you say that [this charge] distorts the body of post-Holocaust theology as you know it?

**John Pawlikowsi:** Well, I would say I think it's a stupid charge, but nonetheless, yes, sure it distorts it. …

**Victoria Barnett**: In conclusion, who is the person or the thinker in this field who really has had an influence on you, if there is someone? Is there somebody that you read to reflect on?

**Elena Procario-Foley:** Irving Greenberg.

**Karla Suomala:** I was going to say the same thing. It's Greenberg.

**Katharina von Kellenbach:** Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel. I would go to the survivor literature.

**Robert Cathey**: Arthur Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*.

**Victoria Barnett**: And do you have your students read these people still?

**Esther Menn:** Making a connection to the living people of Israel—that's my post-Holocaust theology. At our seminary we don't really talk about the Holocaust except at our interfaith *Kristallnacht* commemoration, but the connection to a living people, especially the Jewish community in our neighborhood, is an important conversation.

**Elena Procario-Foley:** This constructive work on relationships that Esther mentions (whatever its source, for example people living in Israel or students' interacting with Holocaust survivors in the States) is so important, because on the one hand it prevents young people from thinking in a vacuum and believing that "history is past and it does not affect us;" while on the other hand it helps to continue to provide a hermeneutic for these dangerous texts that we have

in our tradition. Amy Jill Levine[10] has written about how dangerously easy it is for seminarians, for examples, to reinscribe anti-Jewish motifs into their teaching and preaching when they are learning the New Testament on continents where people have had no historical connection to the Holocaust and don't know [the literature on this].

**Esther Menn:** These connections to people are so important. It's the conversations and joining together, growing gardens in our neighborhoods, holding common commemorations and other events, that are so important—there has to be something else positive that we're building. Am Yisrael hai! The people of Israel lives!

**Karla Suomala:** In my survey course on Hebrew Bible, I use Tanakh, Jewish order, everything so it's a very Jewish approach to learning that text, as opposed to this Christianized veneer. The notes are different, the perspective is different, and all the texts I've required—the very mode of learning is Jewish, and I've integrated this into my Jewish courses and tried to integrate the Havruta style, where you learn the text in community.

**Robert Cathey**: Arthur Cohen makes a profound distinction between the cross on Golgotha as the redemptive mid-point of Christian history and the Shoah as a revelatory mid-point in Jewish history that involves not the slaughter of one Jew but rather millions of Jews without the Christian redemptive significance. *The Tremendum* highlights Jewish and Christian differences rather than the commonalities many Christians find. For example, Cohen calls attention to the Cold War phrase "Judeo-Christian tradition" that was highly significant to theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr but that expresses a false understanding of Judaism for Cohen and other Jews, and that subsumes Judaism into the Christian narrative.

**Victoria Barnett**: Thank you all for this discussion.

For additional resources see the *Selected Bibliography on Post-Holocaust Theology and Interfaith History*, following.

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[1] See the selected bibliography at the conclusion of this article as well as the bibliography of Daniel Langton's article in this issue.
[2] See Greenberg, *Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, Modernity after the Holocaust* (1978).
[3] The 1934 Declaration written by Karl Barth in response to church tensions in Nazi Germany and adopted as the foundation of the Confessing Church; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barmen_Declaration.
[4] See Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother* (2012).
[5] Johann Baptist Metz, a German Catholic theologian whose experience during National Socialism led him to advocate new understandings of Christianity in light of the Holocaust.
[6] Leonard Swidler, Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue at Temple University.
[7] David Blumenthal, Professor of Judaic Studies at Emory University; in this issue see Daniel Langton's discussion of his contributions to post-Holocaust theology.
[8] David Nirenberg, Jannotta Professor of Medieval History and Social Thought at the University of Chicago and author of the recent book *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (2013).
[9] David Sandmel, Crown Ryan Professor of Jewish Studies at the Catholic Theological Union and now Director of Interfaith Affairs at the Anti-Defamation League.

[10] Carpenter Professor of New Testament and Jewish Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and author of *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (2006).

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(See also the bibliography at the end of Daniel Langton's essay for additional literature on post-Holocaust Jewish thought.)


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Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations:

http://www.ccjr.us/index.php

International Conference of Christians and Jews:

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# 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 trialogue 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 theocractic 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 movement[9] 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 history[24] 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 it 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 again 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.

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[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 Gennep, 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).

# *Review:* Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish Christian Muslim Trialogue*, Leonard Grob and John Roth, eds., (University of Washington Press, 2012)*

## By Lauren Tuchman

In *Encountering the Stranger*, co-editors Leonard Grob and John Roth present essays by eighteen contributors, all of whom, in some fashion, explore what it means to encounter the other. The contributors were brought together after attending a workshop at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in October, 2007, and the urgency of the question of how one ought to encounter the other was framed in light of the Holocaust and contemporary religious violence and unrest. Deeply rooted in their respective traditions, though often disagreeing with their coreligionists, these essays provide the reader with a wide breadth of insight into this issue of critical world import. Essays range from overviews of traditional teachings on the other to historical overviews and personal memoirs. What made this book unique was that each essay was followed by a series of questions culled from feedback the author received from their fellow contributors and the author's response to said questions. Often, these responses enabled the author to elucidate in greater depth issues that were unclear or to respond to questions that could very well have been asked in an interfaith setting. I deeply appreciated that thorny issues of geopolitical and theological concern were not brushed aside but were instead tackled head on.

I found this book to be of great personal, professional and academic interest. As a rabbinical student, it is my firmly held belief that clergy of all traditions need to be equipped to work collaboratively with those of other faith traditions towards the common good. Throughout their respective histories, the Abrahamic traditions have conceived of the other in a variety of ways and I believe an honest study and assessment of this is critical knowledge for clergy and emerging clergy.

I found this book of tremendous personal interest as well. Like many of my peers, I come from an interfaith family in which issues of religious difference and how said differences might coexist have been issues with which I have and continue to grapple tremendously. This book gave me insights into how Judaism and Christianity, the two traditions in my family, have viewed and interacted with the other historically and currently. As such, I was particularly intrigued by Rachel N. Baum's essay, in which she discusses her intermarriage and its meaning within and outside of her Jewish community. As the number of interfaith and intercultural families continues to rise, it is critical for clergy and concerned laity to have holistic views of the impact such families will have upon the religious and sociocultural landscape.

As our world continues to become increasingly multireligious, interreligious encounters amongst clergy, scholars and laity will continue to be of crucial import. This volume provided me with historical and textual overviews, personal perspectives and a wealth of insight that will enable me to do this work within my own rabbinate. I deeply appreciated that there were six contributors from each tradition, as this enables the reader to get a multi-faceted glimpse into the inner workings of that tradition, as well as the personal perspectives, theological and sociopolitical standpoints from which the contributors derive their understandings and conclusions. Though every tradition is as diverse and as multivocal as the amount of adherents, the multivocality of this volume avoided the all-too-common trap works of this sort fall into when one voice is seen as representative of the whole. The questions and responses which followed the original essay enabled the volume to have a real sense of dialogic encounter about

it, as opposed to being merely an anthology of thematic essays. I also deeply appreciated that the contributors were able to meet one another in the process of writing and compiling the volume and that such relationship-building impacted the final work. I would highly recommend this volume to seminary and rabbinical students, as well as concerned scholars, graduate students and those in the field.

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# *Review:* Amidst Mass Atrocity and The Rubble of Theology: Searching for a Viable Theodicy, *by Peter Amirand, (Wipf and Stock, 2012).*

## By Hussein Rashid

Peter Amirand's book, *Amidst Mass Atrocity and The Rubble of Theology*, is a weighty volume, both conceptually and emotionally. Starting with the voices of witnesses of mass atrocity and ending with the struggle to create a theodicy to respond, the project is ambitious. The book masters context and nuance, but I find it still struggles in delivering the theodicy the title hints at. Rather, it seeks to establish a framework for creating a theodicy of mass atrocity, and points to directions of further discussion.

The text itself is split into three sections: testimonies of mass atrocity, approaches to theodicy, and framing a theodicy of mass atrocity. The first part gives basic definitions of the terms at stake. While the discussion of what defines witness and how the author is using testimonies to atrocities is rich and textured, the explanation of the rest of the terms is wanting. For example, the author defines "atrocity" from the *Oxford English Dictionary* (p. 15), giving criticisms of the term, but no clear sense of how he intends to use the word. He returns to the question much later in the text, opening a discussion on man-made disasters versus natural disasters (p. 136).

The author then turns his attention to theodicy, looking at Christian Philosophical Theodicy, Liberation Theology, and Post-Shoah Jewish Theology. Each of these chapters is a wealth of information. Structurally, they veer between literature review and a deeper synthesis of key arguments. As a reader, the heavy use of quotes muddies the author's larger point. At the same time, the work is so provocative it is difficult to conceive of a different structural approach. I do wish the author's evaluation sections would give us a more forceful recap of the arguments.

Each chapter in the second section deals with important ideas in the realm of theodicy, and the author does provide important context. We are given an introduction to questions of divine morality and rationality (p. 112 and 121), and whether those terms mean anything in the divine context. He also introduces us to the anthropodicy (p. 136) as a way to understand human activity in contributing to atrocity. The subtlety of the connection between theodicy and anthropodicy is delicately drawn out, and almost demands a separate treatment. What I found most valuable was his use of misotheism (p. 188), which seeks to hold God responsible, rather than abandoning God in the face of the unbearable.

The discussion of misotheism occurs in the chapter on post-Shoah theology. The author is clearly positioned in a Catholic context and seeks to look at other theologies to enrich his own understanding of theodicy. In the early parts of the book, he does an admirable job, including a discussion of what a Buddhist non-theistic theodicy may look like (p. 44). However, by the time he reaches the post-Shoah section, the text reads as more appropriationist, subsumed into his Catholic thinking instead of an active engagement. The shift is not explicit, but is palpable in contrast to his earlier writing in the volume.

He also uncritically uses the term *muselmänner* in various points throughout the text. The term, German for "Muslims" (sg. *muselmann*), was a derogatory one used to refer to captives in the concentration camps who had given up the will to live. In a text that talks about the evil that people do to one another, it seems odd that the othering practiced by those who are treated as the ultimate Other is not discussed.

The concluding section does not provide us with a theodicy of mass atrocity, rather, it

provides a framework for thinking about theodicy. While useful, I do not understand how unique the framework is, as it seems to flow from the background that the author himself establishes. In addition, I do not see how it is a framework for a theodicy of mass atrocity, rather than a framework for theodicy in general. The suggestion for pastoral thought does tie nicely back to the author's interest in the voices of witness of mass atrocity.

Despite the concerns outlined above, the book does an admirable job of taking on a difficult topic. In many respects, the criticisms indicate the depths that have yet to be explored in what is clearly a new conceptualization of theodicy. The text is targeted towards more advanced students in theology, and it is difficult to imagine this text being taught in pieces. It is easy to recommend for a course in theodicy, and perhaps for targeted discussions in interreligious theology.

**Hussein Rashid** is an academic and activist. His broad research project involves the representation and self-representation of Muslims in America. Dr. Rashid has published on Islamicate musics in America, and has delivered talks on the Muslim-American blogistan and Muslims in graphic novels. Currently, Dr. Rashid teaches at Hofstra University.

## Resources at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) draws about 1.7 million visitors annually from around the world. While most visitors come to tour the exhibitions, the USHMM is much more than a traditional museum. Part of the Museum's mission is to educate about the history of the Holocaust and to work with members of all professions who seek to explore and understand its implications for their own work. The Museum offers programs for members of the military, secondary school teachers, police officers, international delegations brought to the U.S. by the State Department, and a wide range of other groups who discover important lessons in this history for their own spheres of responsibility. The Museum's Center for the Prevention of Genocide works with U.S. and foreign government officials and other professionals who must respond to contemporary genocidal emergencies. The Museum's extensive library and archival holdings include an ever-expanding collection of books, oral histories, original documents, and photographs. All these collections are open to the public, who can find resources ranging from the personal documentation that is so crucial for Holocaust survivors and their families to large archival collections that enable scholars from around the world to do interdisciplinary and cutting edge research.

Much of that research is done at the Museum's Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, which includes the Programs on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust (PERH). PERH offers programs and resources for leaders and members of all faith communities, as well as for scholars and professors who are researching or teaching the aspects of this history that pertain to the disciplines of religious studies and church history. Their research on the Holocaust continues to open new areas of inquiry and offer new insights into the complexities of this history that are relevant to scholars and practitioners of interreligious relations.

Here are some additional resources that may be of interest to JIRS readers:

The Path to Nazi Genocide (film)

The Nazi Book Burnings (film)

Voices on Antisemitism (podcast series)

Resources and information about contemporary genocide and genocide prevention: http://www.ushmm.org/confront-genocide

## Beware Standby Mode

## By Elise Alexander

Earlier this month, *State of Formation* and the *Journal of Inter-Religious Studies* graciously offered me the chance to join them in a tour of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum followed by a discussion of Holocaust education and the phenomena of collaboration and resistance, especially among people of faith. It was, to say the least, a moving experience. Since then, the suffering in Syria has continued; the Holocaust, the Armenian genocide, and the Rwandan genocide have all had days or periods of remembrance.

That is as far as I can easily write this post.

Asked to reflect on the atrocities committed with tacit-- and sometimes explicit-- support from Christian religious figures and people of faith, I have many avenues to pursue, too many for me to marshal those thoughts like a good cat-herder. Asked to reflect on the involvement or lack thereof from bystanders to those atrocities, I keep coming full-circle to the question that was raised several times during our tour:

"How could people do that?"

My instinct is to come to the defense of those senior citizens featured in the short films on constant replay in the museum, recalling how when they were young, they informed the police of their Jewish neighbors' whereabouts. Or they watched with their childhood friends while armed men buried a mass grave and then looters came and sifted through the dirt for valuables. And I think it is important to recognize that for many such people, their impetus for acting that way came from emotions very familiar to us today, like fear: fear of being hurt, fear of failing their families, fear of getting involved in big things when really they just wanted to paint still-life watercolors or devote their lives to their poetry or their research on folklore. It is important to remember that heroes are celebrated and deserve to be emulated, but that they are heroes because they are not the norm. But I have to halt halfway, because no matter how much I understand that some bystanders and collaborators acted out of love for their families or other such understandable forces, they still were a part of atrocities. And despite the real power of forgiveness and reconciliation, that will never not be true.

The reason these things are important to remember, though, is because they are things that are still true. These factors are still important in our decision-making today. These things are important to remember because the question of how people could do that is the wrong question. It assumes there are "people" out there, and then there is "me" and "us" over here: that we would never, could never, do "that."

A better question is, recognizing that humans act from many of the same loves and fears the world over, how do we do that? For Christians, who are an Easter people but are also a Maundy Thursday and Good Friday people, how and when do we say with Simon Peter, "I don't know him! I don't know what you're talking about!" Because we do. I do. We look away, we change the channel, we cross to the other side of the street, we don't get involved because we know it will break our hearts and we have to be ready to go to work in the morning to pay rent and buy groceries. We say, "That's his problem," or "Those people have been fighting for centuries," or "I couldn't make a difference anyway." And yes, there is a place for self-care, but there is also a place for other-care.

I still don't have a clear message to take from this or to offer to you. Just-- be careful of living too long on standby mode. In the Gospel of John, Simon Peter is given what I suppose is a

second chance. "Do you love me?" Jesus asks. "Then feed my sheep." Simon Peter is given a second chance which he uses for good, and I believe in a God of love and forgiveness, but Simon Peter still lived his life toting the wreckage of his first chance. It will never have not happened. He will never have not stood by while an innocent man he loved died by imperial torture. How many times did he-- how many times do the elderly folks in those videos-- wish they had been braver and bolder and more awake?

Justice calls-- divine love calls-- humanity calls-- your neighbor calls-- his sheep call-- be awake!

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# Opening the Blinds and Saying "Never Again"

## By Esther Boyd

With each passing year, technology becomes faster, more intuitive, and more social. With ever-evolving technology, we like to think that large-scale atrocities simply cannot happen - we would be too quick to film and post and share, galvanizing the forces of justice. Petitions and hashtags spread like wildfire, movements go viral within hours, and the grassroots power of those protecting our basic human rights would flood the cities. Haven't we seen the power of social media for revolution and change over the past few years worldwide? It becomes more and more difficult to censor individuals when we so connected, and there's no going back now.

The immediacy of information and response has not yet saved us from ourselves. There are horrific injustices occurring every day around the world that are not being documented and shared. We don't always use the speed and ease of technology to do something about it. Millions die from hunger, millions are systematically killed, and millions are denied basic human rights because of their race, sexuality, religious or political beliefs, gender, and economic class. We might not have all the information, but we can no longer claim that we don't know what is happening. Even if we narrow the scope from the entire world to just one city, I must admit that I witness social injustice every day and often do nothing about it.

Recently, I attended a workshop at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC with other *State of Formation* Contributing Scholars. This visit brought up many lingering questions from a spring break trip I took with my undergraduate students in March focusing on hunger and homelessness in Philadelphia, PA. I was particularly struck by the stories of people in Europe and the United States turning a blind eye to what was happening around them during WWII. Hearing the stories of how the Nazi regime started, picking off small parts of the population, relocating Jews and others into ghettos, criminalizing their businesses and livelihood, I couldn't help but think of the sheer numbers of social injustices that we witness every day on the streets of our own cities here in the United States.

Walking through the USHMM, I was struck by the sheer amount of documentation that has been collected by archivists and historians, much of it donated from personal and family collections. Everything from photographs, letters, maps, accounts, personal items, children's drawings, and even shoes have been collected and cataloged to help us better understand the lives of those who survived the Shoah and those who did not. I was shocked to learn that many of the photographs taken of individuals as they entered the camps were taken by soldiers and guards, often immediately before sending those same individuals to their immediate death. Documentation was important to the Nazi regime. It was used for propaganda and for records, meticulously detailing the experiences and the individuals affected by their reign of terror.

Because that period is so well documented, we know that most citizens knew what was happening around them, and although some did a great deal to help those being targeted and decimated, most ordinary citizens looked the other way until they no longer could. One story collected by museum historian Dr. Victoria Barnett told of a trolley car that cut right through a Jewish ghetto in Germany. As the trolley entered the ghetto, a conductor would walk through the car and close the blinds, which would be reopened when the ghetto was behind them. This story perfectly encapsulates the willful blindness that allowed thousands if not millions of people to look the other way. Perhaps it was in response to a hopelessness, or a sense of "what can I possibly do to change it?", or perhaps it was an act of self-preservation. Today, some people hear these stories and want to place blame on these bystanders, want to condemn those who stood by and did nothing.

The story of the trolley reminded me of an early morning spent in the subway of Philadelphia with students at the Hub of Hope, a service location for people experiencing homelessness. Each morning, folks are invited into the Hub for a hot drink and medical or social services. The Hub is located in the subway terminal because during the winter months, people living on the street flock to the protection of the subway, safe from winter's cold and icy winds. Two students walked through the subways with a Hub worker to invite individuals to come in for coffee or assistance. Although it was only 6am, the police had already cleared away most of the people who had slept there, sending them back outside into the cold, March morning with nothing to eat and nowhere to go. "We have to clear them out first thing," one policeman said. "Commuters come down here to go to work, and they don't want the eyesore. We know it's rough, but it's out of our hands."

I think the slogan "Never Again" can be applied more broadly to social justice issues around the world. What if it meant never again turning a blind eye to what you see happening on your own street? Never again allowing people to fall through the cracks created by systems of inequality? Never again silencing the voices of victims? Never again waiting for an injustice to reach the level of genocide before we rise up and act? Being called to justice sometimes means being called to make a scene. We can't wait until things get bad enough - there is no "bad enough" when it comes to people's lives. Whether it is the closing of HIV clinics in Uganda, the criminalization of dissenting voices in Saudi Arabia, systematic violence against women, the exploitation of workers, the abuse of children, the denial of human rights, or someone being forced to beg for food, we can no longer pretend we don't see it. We know about it. We are connected. We don't have an excuse anymore.

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# Contextualizing Antisemitism in Modern America

## By Simran Jeet Singh

Earlier this year, I received a special invitation to visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum with a group of distinguished young scholars. I was thrilled by the prospect of receiving a guided tour from Dr. Victoria Barnett, director of the Museum's Programs on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust, and I immediately accepted the invitation.

A couple days before our program in early April, I received a message from our event coordinator who raised the possibility that the weapons policies might prohibit me from entering the premises with my kirpan, an article of faith that I carry with me. I was recently denied entry to the United Nations headquarters for the same reason, which caused me to miss an event where I was scheduled to speak, and I presumed dealing with the Museum's security would be an equally frustrating process. I was pleasantly surprised, however, to learn that this would not be an issue and that I would be allowed to attend the program.

During my train ride from New York City to Washington, D.C., I reflected on the fact that the Holocaust Museum retained hired security at on their premises. I thought about how, like the Jewish community, my own community has long been targeted in hateful violence, both in our homeland of Punjab and in America. I reflected on how shameful it is that religious, cultural, and educational institutions such as the Holocaust Museum feel the need to maintain security personnel and policies.

I am embarrassed to admit this -- especially since much of my recent research has focused on hate violence and xenophobia in modern America -- but the question actually did cross my mind: "Is all this security really necessary?"

Suffice it to say, my question has been answered. As I write, our nation mourns the bigoted and targeted murder of three Americans at a Jewish community center and an assisted care facility in Kansas City, Kansas. Police authorities have yet to officially identify it as a hate-crime, but all signs are pointing in that direction. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the shooter, Frazier Glenn Cross, Jr., served as a founder and grand dragon for the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) in South Carolina and later founded another KKK group, the White Patriot Party. Witnesses have testified that Cross was explicitly targeting Jews and was shouting neo-Nazi slogans while being detained by police officers.

We are mistaken when we try to make this a story of the past. No matter how much we wish it wasn't true, antisemitism, neo-Nazism, and domestic terrorism are all realities in modern America.

This is precisely why visiting the Holocaust Museum has meant so much to me.

As I traversed the exhibition floors, I learned about the conditions and processes that led to the marginalization of entire communities. I observed the ways in which those in power manipulated and coerced the masses to think of one another as less or more human. I found myself fixating on every little artifact and image in the museum, trying to make sense of the senseless.

The most difficult moment for me was watching original footage of a public shaming, in which members of a small town tied up two adolescents, led them in a public procession to the town square, and then took turns publicly cutting their hair. I couldn't take my eyes off the screen, yet it took everything I had to not look away.

After the guided tours and panel discussions, I walked through an exhibit on the bottom floor of the Museum that focused on contemporary antisemitic violence in America. I was surprised to find myself a bit unprepared for what I observed. It was not news to me that neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups exist in our nation, yet somehow I had never connected the dots on how the dark history of antisemitism has translated into and informs our experiences in modern America.

I had walked into the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum with the intention of thinking about how the Holocaust might relate to other instances of historical violence targeting marginalized communities around the globe. However, the structure and design of the museum compelled me to think of the here and now. Better understanding the conditions leading up to the Holocaust has helped me contextualize antisemitic violence in modern America, and this context has provided me a critical perspective for viewing acts of domestic terrorism like the horrific shooting in Kansas City this past weekend.

The moment I heard about the murders in Kansas, I had flashbacks to an eerily similar hate crime that targeted my own community, and these memories blurred into everything I learned during my visit to the Holocaust Museum.

I feel like my eyes and heart are more open than ever, and I find myself haunted by the beautiful words of Elie Wiesel, which are posted on the wall of the Museum: "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness."

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