



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Comparing the Theological and Philosophical Responses to the Two Great Jewish
Catastrophes

Joshua Boyce (1600551)

BA Religious Studies

Dissertation HPRS6012

I certify that this dissertation is my own work, and that any use of other people's work is
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Word Count: 10,264.

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Abstract

The dissertation analyses the theological and philosophical responses which emerged as a result of the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE and the Shoah. These catastrophes have had a tremendous impact on the Jewish religion and as such a comparison of the responses is warranted to investigate any similarities between the responses and provide analysis of the differences. The introduction provides the background, method and the rationale for the overall dissertation.

This is followed by a chapter outlining the responses which emerged from the destruction of the Temple using the Jewish historian Josephus and the apocalyptic texts as primary sources. They express deep lament over the current suffering of Israel but seek to justify the validity of the covenant, identifying the sin of the people (caused by the Jewish tyrants, the evil heart or disobedience to God's law). These sources ultimately find hope in the future, revealed in the eschatological promises for the apocalyptic texts and in the punishment of the wicked in Josephus' response.

Following this, a chapter outlines the responses to the Shoah include those engaging in theodicy such as Berkovits, the doubt of the survivor (Elie Wiesel) and more radical responses such as Richard Rubenstein and Ignaz Maybaum (Hitler as God's instrument). The previous two chapters provide the basis for comparing the responses in the concluding chapter which identifies loose comparisons which can be made including the history of the Jews as a persecuted group who have experience catastrophes before, helping the Jewish people to overcome the theological and philosophical difficulties of the Shoah. Ultimately, it is argued that the two events cannot be compared due to the unprecedented nature of the Shoah which could not be responded to using traditional Jewish theology but required a new theological and philosophical framework (e.g. Fackenheim).

Introduction

The following dissertation aims to compare the various theological and philosophical responses which emerged following the two great Jewish catastrophes namely, the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE and the Shoah. It aims to note any similarities between responses as well as analysing any differences, suggesting reasons why this might be the case. The dissertation will be split into three chapters; the first two chapters providing the basis for comparing the responses, whilst the concluding chapter highlights the similarities and differences in theological and philosophical responses.

The first chapter shall give details of the historical context, detailing the events leading up to the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE and the impact that it had on the Jewish faith. The chapter will outline the key theological and philosophical responses which emerged as a result of this catastrophe, utilizing several primary sources in the process. Key primary sources include the work of Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian writing in great detail about the historical detail surrounding the destruction of the second Temple as well as his own theological reflection to the destruction. The chapter shall then consider the apocalyptic texts of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch which present a lament over Israel's suffering, questioning the fairness of God and his role in the destruction before finding hope in the eschatological promises of God revealed to them. This chapter shall provide the basis for comparing the responses to of catastrophe with the responses to the Shoah in the concluding chapter.

The second chapter will outline the context leading to the attempted annihilation of the Jews in Nazi Germany and how anti-Jewish measures escalated into the final solution to exterminate European Jewry. Following this, the chapter will analyse some of the key theological and philosophical responses which emerged as a result of the Shoah. The chapter shall mainly consult primary sources including the work of major thinkers Eliezer Berkovits, Emil Fackenheim and Richard Rubenstein. The chapter shall analyse the responses of those who sought to defend God (e.g. Berkovits) and those who rejected God through the emergence of radical theology (e.g. Rubenstein, Maybaum). This chapter will be vital in outlining the responses which emerged as well as providing the basis for comparing the responses to the destruction of the second Temple in the concluding chapter.

The final chapter shall analyse the nature of the responses to the destruction of the second Temple and the Shoah detailing any parallels between responses and providing analysis of any differences. Through utilizing the material discussed in the previous chapters, it shall

attempt to provide reasoning why the nature of the responses may differ and provide a conclusion as to whether the theological and philosophical responses to the two catastrophes can be compared.

Chapter 1: Theological and Philosophical Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple

Introduction

The destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE at the hands of the Romans can be seen as one of the major catastrophes in Jewish history. The Temple had been rebuilt and completed in 515 BCE following its first destruction which devastated the Jewish faith in 587 BCE by the Babylonians. Following the rebuilding, there was a rejuvenation of the Jewish faith with the Temple being seen as the focal point of the faith and a symbol of the covenant which existed between God and his chosen people.

Following the death of King Herod (c. 73-4 BCE) the country was divided among several parties resulting in increased unrest between Jews and Romans due to some unfavourable Emperors taking charge. Particularly from the period of 66 CE onwards, there was increasing tension between the Roman authority and the Jews, culminating in many incidents, deaths and military campaigns from both parties. The catalyst proving in Josephus' account to be the captain of the Temple ending the tradition of offering sacrifices in the Temple on behalf of the emperor and Rome as a show of respect and loyalty towards the authority (*The Jewish War*, 2.17.2). This action sparked the start of a great war between the Romans and Jewish factions.

Vespasian eventually became emperor and appointed his son Titus to take on the military campaign in Judea amidst growing tensions between Jewish rebel groups and the Romans. This ultimately resulted in the expanded Roman army (greater than ones who had failed before) quashing the Jewish rebels. Led by Titus, they captured Jerusalem resulting in the slaughter of all who were caught and the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE.

This catastrophe brought about great theological challenges for the Jewish religion as the centre of the Jewish faith had been destroyed for a second time with a more devastating effect on the religion. The catastrophe in 70 CE proved to be more devastating as it wiped out the very centre of Jewish life, the Temple and the sacrificial cult contained within it. The Temple was also not rebuilt on this occasion and resulted in the shift of Jewish worship from the Temple to the Synagogue. There was also a renewed focus on the study of the Torah developed to fill the void of the sacrifices formerly conducted in the Temple. The following will consider the various ways in which Jewish writers attempted to wrestle with the

difficulties posed as a result of the destruction using the work of the Jewish historian Josephus and the apocalyptic texts of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch.

Part 1: Josephus

Flavius Josephus is a key figure during the time of the second Temple whose writings provide a major template for analysis of the key theological responses which arose as a result of the catastrophe. Josephus also provides historical information surrounding the destruction and the events which led to this. Flavius Josephus (CE 37-c.100) was born the son of a Jewish priest, most probably in Jerusalem as Joseph ben Matthias before later adopting the name Flavius due to his allegiance to the emperor Vespasian.¹ His work on the Jewish war is one of the major surviving sources from the time of the destruction which can be analysed as part of the Jewish responses to the catastrophe.

One of Josephus' more extensive works is *Jewish War* (c. 75 CE) and although this work is largely historical in nature, there are many theological responses which feature in *Jewish War* helping analyse the Jewish response to the national catastrophe. The key theological observations which will be discussed in this chapter are the blame of sin as a means of explaining the catastrophe, God's role in the catastrophe and the subsequent theodicy (justification of God) contained in *Jewish War*.

a. Theodicy

One prominent theological observation which can be found in the writings of Josephus is the blame which Josephus places on Israel's sin for the destruction of the temple. Although there are other historical factors as to why the fighting between the Romans and Jews broke out (for example, the gradual decline in the relationship between the two groups following the death of King Herod and the subsequent division of Herod's land between several Roman procurators), theologically speaking, it is clear that Josephus places the blame on the sins of the Jewish people (specifically the Jewish tyrants). This is made clear in the opening of Jewish war where Josephus blames the destruction of the Temple and the ultimate conflict between the Jews and Romans on the Jewish tyrants, stating that '...it was a seditious temper of our own that destroyed it; and that they were the tyrants among the Jews who brought the Roman power upon us...' (*The Jewish War*, preface: 10).

¹ 'Josephus', *The Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1997, p. 17. [Online] Available at: www.jstor.org/stable/3209569. [Accessed: 10 November 2018].

In this passage Josephus clearly outlines his political standpoint, placing the blame on Jewish tyrants whilst distancing the blame from the Romans who were “unwilling” participants in the attacking of the Jews and their holy Temple. One possible reason for his seemingly sympathetic approach towards the Romans may be due to his allegiance with the emperor Vespasian (one must be aware of the potential bias towards the Romans when analysing Josephus’ response). However, it is clear that Josephus has an unwavering belief in the sinfulness of the people and the subsequent inevitability of the Temple’s destruction, as divine punishment would have been carried out with or without the Romans.

Josephus distinguishes between two main Jewish transgressions which result in God’s subsequent abandonment of his sanctuary. Firstly, bloodshed in the vicinity of the Temple where Josephus names several victims of slaughter who he considers as being innocent including the priest Ananus and Jesus (4.5.2). Secondly, the “profanation of Sancta” alludes to Josephus’s observations that many rebels would violate the Sabbath or festivals (2.18.9:456; 4.2.3:102-3). For Josephus, these two factors play ‘...a particular role in bringing about the divine punishment that concludes the rebellion’ and thus they are important when discussing Josephus’s theological responses to the destruction of the temple.² Furthermore, Josephus suggests that the Jewish people taking up arms against the Romans in the first place demonstrates a lack of trust in God to resolve the situation (5.9.4:399-400) and is another factor in bringing about the catastrophe.

In his response to the destruction, it is clear that Josephus makes use of two types of responses to display his theodicy. These are his personal and communal discussions surrounding the destruction.³ Firstly, on a personal level, it is clear that Josephus believes in divine punishment of the wicked (7.11.4:453). Such punishment may not manifest itself immediately as punishment may be delayed. This response also makes allowances for the inevitable implications that the suffering of innocent people at the hands of the wicked has on theodicy. On a larger communal level, God may exercise punishment on a nation depending on their behaviour towards God and others in order to uphold accountability for their sins. The earlier stated transgressions in and around the Temple and Josephus’s belief in divine

² Jonathan. Klawans, ‘Josephus and Judaism after 70 CE’, in *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp.180-209 (p. 188). [Online]. Available at: <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199928613.001.0001/acprof-9780199928613-chapter-5>. [Accessed: 04 November 2018].

³ Such terms used by Jonathan. Klawans, 2012, see p. 189.

punishment make it clear that for Josephus this was at play in the events surrounding the destruction.

It is clear through the writing of Josephus that his theological responses are grounded in a deeply held belief in a covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. As such Josephus' faith is not damaged by the events (although he expresses lament over the destruction) and the reasoning for this helps to summarise Josephus's theodicy in that 'Although the temple is gone, God has not been defeated, for he brought these events about'.⁴ As discussed by Jonathan Klawans, scholarly discussions often overlook Josephus's theological observations, which is disappointing considering the level of detail in which Josephus comments both theologically and historically on the destruction in attempting to assist the Jewish people come to terms with the catastrophe.⁵ Josephus's model of work later influenced Jewish writers such as the apocalyptic seer's and the rabbis and as such can be considered a valuable source for examining the responses to the destruction.

The Apocalyptic literature

Both 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch belong to a group of highly sophisticated apocalyptic texts written in the aftermath of the destruction of the second Temple as a direct response to the crisis. An apocalypse is a literary genre which originates from the Greek *apokalypsis* meaning revelation and concerns divine revelation in a narrative framework, often concerning end-times or the world to come.

4 Ezra was composed roughly from the end of the first century to the beginning of the second century CE (the dating of around 100 CE receiving substantial scholarly support).⁶ 4 Ezra is set in the fictional setting of the Babylonian exile (the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE), whilst its actual content centres around the destruction in 70 CE. The structure of the book is split into seven sections referred to as "visions" dealing with the theological responses by the alleged author (Ezra, a famous scribe) and subsequent divine revelation received by Ezra.

2 Baruch is set during the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and is attributed to be a set of revelations to the secretary of the prophet Jeremiah written to address the theological implications of the fall of the second temple in 70 CE. There is a general consensus within scholarly debate on this source that it was composed sometime between 70

⁴ Jonathan. Klawans, 'Josephus and Judaism after 70 CE', p. 190.

⁵ Jonathan. Klawans, 'Josephus and Judaism after 70 CE', p. 209.

⁶ For example: Michael. E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 9-10.

and 132 CE, after the fall of the temple and was written after or as a response to 4 Ezra.⁷ 2 Baruch also has a sevenfold structure with the first three sections addressing some of the theological problems, an eschatological prophecy in the fourth section followed by visions in the fifth and sixth sections, ending in an epilogue.⁸ As will become apparent in the analysis which follows, these two texts are closely related in terms of structure, thematic material and other similarities. Although these texts differ in some material, there is merit in analysing the theological responses which are shared by these two texts and the implications on the Jewish responses to the catastrophe. The two texts deal with two main theological questions following the destruction namely, the problem of theodicy and what will take the place of the Temple.

Part 2: 4 Ezra

a. Theodicy

Ezra's first argument surrounding theodicy is based upon the fall of creation and the blight that this has had on the human condition. Ezra clearly places the blame for Israel's current fate upon Adam and the state of the human heart, having been burdened with evil since the fall (4 Ezra: 3:20-27). Ezra goes further and questions why God chose not to remove such an evil heart from his chosen people and allow the Torah to bear fruit: 'Yet you did not take away from them their evil heart, so that your Law might bring forth fruit in them. For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him...what was good departed, and the evil remained' (4 Ezra 3:20-3, cf. 4 Ezra 3:8 where the author lays blame for creations fall at God's door for his unwillingness to hinder them and remove the evil heart). An interesting theological omission from in this passage is the seemingly deliberate avoidance of stating '...that it was God who created the evil inclination in mankind' perhaps reflecting the author's view of free will (differing to some of the rabbinic sources which state that God created the evil heart).⁹ Although the author clearly believes that the evil heart is the ultimate reason for the destruction of the temple, it is evident that the author still struggles to understand why God would allow such a disaster. God seemingly spares Israel's enemies in favour of punishing

⁷ For a more detailed discussion on the date of composition see G. B. Sayler, *Have the Promises Failed? A Literary Analysis of 2 Baruch*, SBLDS 72 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1984), p. 3.

⁸ For a more detailed discussion on the structure of 2 Baruch see John. J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (2nd ed) (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), p. 213.

⁹ Michael. E. Stone, 1990, p. 64.

his chosen people ‘...for I have seen how you endure those who sin, and have spared those who act wickedly, and have destroyed your people...’ (3:30; cf. 4:22-25).

b. Divine Punishment and the Fairness of God

Ezra also asserts that the nation of Israel is in ruins due to the divine punishment due to the sins for which their evil hearts are responsible for (3: 25-28) and posits that the sins of the Gentiles are by no means better than those of the Jewish people. The author questions the fairness of God, failing to comprehend why God has allowed this event to happen. In essence this argument of theodicy centres on God’s seeming unwillingness to remove the evil tendency from his chosen people and their subsequent punishment at the hands of the Gentiles whose deeds are arguably worse than that of the Jews.¹⁰

Following this petition from Ezra on behalf of the Jewish people, Ezra is challenged by the angel Uriel to explain phenomena in this world, when Ezra is unable to, the angel responds by asking Ezra how he expects to understand the way of the Most High. Such comprehension lies beyond human capacity and requires divine revelation (4:1-21). Ezra protests that Israel’s suffering is in the here and now (4:22-25), therefore, why has God permitted such a catastrophe and what will be done to ease the suffering of his people?

c. The Age to Come

Ezra’s final remarks in this section centre around eschatology. The present age is marked by sadness caused by the evil heart and the solution lies in the age to come. Following the revelation, the author asks when the current age will come to an end? God has predetermined such a time and thus it cannot be rushed (4:34-37), however, the time shall come, and not even human sinfulness can stop it. The divine plan for the punishment of the wicked and the heavenly reward for the righteous can then take effect (4:38-43). Although not all of Ezra’s initial questions have been answered, it has temporarily at least diverted Ezra’s attention from sorrow and lament for their present situation to hope for the age to come.

This motif of despair to hope takes place during the course of interactions with the angel. Ezra’s grief and questioning over divine justice are gradually softened and Ezra is assured by the angel that the present age which is marked by sadness and suffering due to the evil heart will soon pass away (4:26-32), and the sorrow shall be overcome when the age ‘...which is

¹⁰George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1981), p. 288.

not yet awake, shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish' (7:31-2 cf. 7:1-16). So, although he receives no real answer as to the 'why' of Israel's suffering, the scribe's grief and frustration over Israel's current fate gradually abates as he learns to find solace in the eschatological promises of God.

Theologically speaking, this represents a fundamental aspect of both apocalyptic texts with hope in an age to come. God did not create just one world but created a world beyond our current one, both worlds are '...within the design of the same God, but they are sharply separated from each other'.¹¹

d. Israel's current plight

4 Ezra frequently appeals to the divine, lamenting over the current plight of the Jews as they have succumbed to the Gentiles. The author clearly believes in a covenantal relationship and questions the Jews are being punished rather than the Gentiles (5:34-40). Uriel responds by stating that Ezra cannot begin to comprehend the way of the most high and God's love for his chosen people. Ezra ponders whether God could make the end of this life come sooner, presumably a reflection of Ezra's lament over the destruction. Ezra is reassured that God has his own time and divine plan for his creation which has been present from the beginning of time (5:44-49).

e. Visions

The dialogue in the previous sections is followed by a series of apocalyptic visions one of which powerfully helps to transform the initial grief-stricken Ezra into a character who can express much hope for the people of Israel. Ezra is confronted by a grieving woman (over the death of her son) and Ezra, despite his own initial dismissal of the woman, begins to reassure and console the woman through the promise of her son's resurrection (10:15-18, 24). This is the first section where Ezra begins to express real hope in the knowledge of the age to come and is encouraged by the angel to view the new Zion (10: 55-57) as a promise that will help alleviate his grief.

The underlying message of the vision presented is that the grieving woman represents Zion (more specifically the grief of God's people in this present time). Whilst Ezra consoles the woman with the promise of resurrection so to the angel has reassured Ezra through the eschatological promises of God. Finally, the woman is transformed in the vision into the new

¹¹ John. J. Collins, 1998, p. 204

Zion and Ezra is encouraged knowing that the coming of the new age will revive the Jewish people and their faith once more.

The author of 4 Ezra presents great theological questions at the start of his interactions as he desperately seeks the answers as to why the Jewish people are suffering. Ezra clearly realises Israel's current plight is due to the evil heart of Adam and the fall of humanity burdening all his descendants since. Although the author questions the justice of God, allowing the evil heart to take hold of humanity, he gradually comes to the realisation that one cannot know the way of the divine. It clear from the grief expressed by the scribe that the catastrophe of 70 CE presented real theological and philosophical questioning and demanded the crafting of a sophisticated and divinely inspired response leaning on the eschatological promises of God. Ultimately, the current situation lies in the sin of Israel, as they have failed to uphold God's law, when they return to the law they will once again find God's favour. Over the course of dialogue with the angel, the scribes despair turns to a renewed hope for the age to come where the suffering of the current age will come to an end for the righteous and the punishment of Israel's enemies will take place.

Part 3: 2 Baruch

a. God's Justice and power

The opening of 2 Baruch takes a very different approach to that of 4 Ezra where the setting is before the destruction rather than during the exile (1:1-5). Baruch is given warning of what is to happen to God's chosen people due to the sinfulness of the people 'I shall bring evil upon this city and its inhabitants...And I shall scatter this people among the nations that they may do good to the nations' (1:4-5), who shall only be omitted from God's favour temporarily to be chastened and purified once again. As Baruch protests the looming destruction, he is assured of a temporary destruction as a heavenly Temple is preserved in paradise, therefore, given this understanding, the events of 70 CE may not be as catastrophic as first it may seem. Even in the opening narrative of 2 Baruch, there is a sense that although the destruction provides reason to lament, there does not seem to be the same level of grief and lament over the Jewish situation as there was in 4 Ezra.

b. Theodicy

The second section (2 Baruch 10-12) contains a lament from Baruch over the grief found through the destruction and questions why the enemies prosper whilst God's people suffer.

However, by the end of this lament, Baruch is convinced that the grief is not for eternity, but God will exercise divine punishment against their enemies, maintaining a covenantal relationship between God and his chosen people. The justice of God is shown to ultimately prevail after a time of destruction for the Jewish people when God will punish the enemies of his nation.

c. The Chastisement of God's People

The theme of chastisement takes hold here in the second section, arguing that God shows mercy to his people by the immediacy of their punishment that they might be pardoned from later judgement. In contrast '...the enemy, by their continued sins, (to) merit a greater punishment on the day of vengeance'.¹² Baruch reacts to God's initial justification over the chastisement of the Jews with two main concerns namely, God's reasoning, as the retribution against the nations may come too late and the usefulness of righteousness.

These two concerns arise from the author's discontent with God's initial response to the theological implications of the catastrophe. The author questions why God might chasten his own people but delays the punishment of the wicked. They seem to live in happiness whilst Israel suffers so greatly, '... I know that there are many who have sinned and who... have left the world' (2 Baruch 14:2). For the author of 2 Baruch, then, the suffering of God's people is as a direct result of their disobedience to God's Law (42:4; 84:2-5); only when they return to the Law will their fortunes be restored and salvation be assured (44:7; 84:6). God encourages Baruch to look past the present strife and look towards a better future. A future focused on the Torah and not on the justice of God for Baruch has been promised that the wicked will be punished eventually. The earthly Jerusalem may be temporary, but the Jewish people can have hope that the heavenly counterpart is a permanent dwelling for the righteous.

d. The Survival of the Jewish Community

Another key response which features heavily in 2 Baruch (as it does in 4 Ezra also) is the author's concern over the survival of the Jewish community. After all, the destruction calls into question the validity of the covenantal relationship between God. The loss of the land and subsequent dispersion of the Jewish people is a particular concern of the author in the first section and questions the threat that this loss might have on the community. The author laments, 'For if you destroy your city and delivery up your country to those who hate us, how

¹² Gwendolyn. B. Sayler, 1984, p. 46.

will the name of Israel be remembered again?’ (2 Baruch 3: 5-6). Baruch wonders whether the law of the Torah may be remembered following such a catastrophe or whether the enemy will take hold should God’s covenantal promise fail.

By the latter section of 2 Baruch (77:1-26), the author reminds the Jewish community of the hope which has been revealed to him through the eschatological promises revealed to him. If the Jewish people remain faithful to the Torah, the covenant will be upheld, they will return to the promised land and their iniquities forgiven. Such promise and hope for the future is characterised by the author’s description of God found in 2 Baruch 77: 7 which states a merciful and gracious God who shall do good to you (his people) rather than evil.

This is clearly a very different attitude towards God from Baruch’s initial sceptical stance on the nature of God and his relationship with the Jewish people in the opening passages. This shows a comparable journey from the author from despair to hope similar to that found in 4 Ezra (although the grief and questioning of God is heightened in 4 Ezra).

Conclusion

The responses of Josephus and the apocalyptic seers Ezra and Baruch form an important body of Jewish literature responding to the catastrophe of 70 CE. There are varying similarities between these sources which may reflect the nature of the Jewish response as a whole with the sources attempting to wrestling with the key theological and philosophical questions which emerged and attempting to comfort the Jewish community.

These sources deal with the issue of theodicy by absolving God of guilt, despite the initial questioning of divine justice by the likes of Ezra, they all come to a realisation that there is an element of human responsibility for the destruction. Josephus places the blame on the Jewish tyrants and the sins conducted in the vicinity of the Temple resulting in divine punishment. The apocalyptic seers, however, take a different stance on this issue for example 4 Ezra identifies the evil heart sown in Adam and his descendants, the result being disobedience to the law of God which has brought divine punishment about. Similarly, for 2 Baruch, Israel suffers for their disobedience to the law and only when they return to the law of their forefathers may they find themselves in God’s favour once more.

All express an element of hope for the future; however, Josephus and the apocalyptic texts differ in the nature of such hope. For example, Josephus clearly believes in the punishment of

the wicked (which may be delayed for a period) and although expressing lament over Israel's current plight, believes that God has not been defeated for he brought these events upon them.

The apocalyptic texts differ as the hope found in 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch is found through the eschatological promises of God in the age to come. The righteous are rewarded, the wicked shall be punished and the suffering of the current world shall end. The sources analysed above shall be vital when comparing the theological and philosophical responses in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 2: Theological and Philosophical responses to the Shoah

Introduction

I shall elect to use the term ‘Shoah’ primarily as a preferred term to describe the catastrophe which took place under the Nazi party.¹³ The Shoah represents the systematic annihilation of the Jews at the hands of Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) and the Nazi party in Germany.

The Nazis felt pure hatred towards the Jews because of their racial identity (anti-Semitism) rather than their religious affiliation (anti-Judaism). What began as Nazi propaganda and restrictions against the Jews (1935 for example, marked the prohibiting of communication between Jews and non-Jews) soon began to take a more violent form, such as on *Kristallnacht*, when, on 9-10 November 1938, Jewish synagogues, homes and businesses were destroyed. All of these measures culminated in the “Final Solution”, a plan to exterminate European Jewry. Through the use of concentration camps (working and death camps) and gas chambers, the Germans and the Nazi party had an “efficient” workforce during World War Two (1939-1945) as well as providing a solution to the Jewish problem, where by 1945 approximately six million Jews had been murdered in the catastrophe.

To this day, the Shoah remains one of the most prominent examples of unspeakable evil and mass genocide in World history and continues to demand deep questioning within religious spheres. The chapter will outline the various ways in which post-Shoah Jewish writers attempted to wrestle with the theological and philosophical difficulties posed as a result of the Shoah using the work of key individuals in the field such as Eliezer Berkovits, Emil Fackenheim, Richard Rubenstein and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel.

Part 1 Theodicy: Justification as to Why God Permits Evil

In likeness with the other key theological and philosophical responses to Jewish catastrophes, the responses to the Shoah largely concern the problem of theodicy in light of such suffering. Many Jewish writers questioned why God would allow such suffering to happen to his chosen people.

a. Concealing the Face

¹³ The word ‘*Shoah*’ is the Hebrew word for ‘destruction’ whilst the word ‘Holocaust’ comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew meaning ‘burnt offering’. This is rarely used by the majority of Jews because of its connotations with the victims of the Shoah being ‘burnt offerings’ when in fact they were blameless victims.

Eliezer Berkovits (1908-1992) was an Orthodox rabbi who made a substantial contribution to the post-Holocaust responses, particularly in *Faith after the Holocaust* (1973) where he argues that there is reason for faith despite the Shoah. Berkovits further develops the concept of *Hester Panim*, the 'Hiding of the Face', in a form of theodicy defending the position of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God in the cosmos.

Even the title *Faith after the Holocaust* seems to imply an element of faith and trust in the God of the Jewish people even after the horrors of the Shoah.¹⁴ Despite this apparent affirmation of faith by Berkovits, he remains highly sympathetic both to those who experienced the Shoah and rebelled in their faith and to those whose faith survived such atrocities. Berkovits reflects this view by affirming faith in an all-powerful God of the Jews whilst not undermining the great suffering experienced by those whose faith was shattered by their experiences.¹⁵ Berkovits recognised that for many, the Shoah led to a crisis of faith with many rejecting God and states that 'Those who rejected did so in authentic rebellion; those who affirmed and testified to the very end did so in authentic faith'.¹⁶

A prominent aspect of Berkovits' philosophical response concerns *Hester Panim* which is God's apparent absence or distance from the sufferer. Berkovits identifies two distinct expressions of *Hester Panim*, citing biblical passages to support this claim. Berkovits arrives at this conclusion because of his rejection that all misfortunes or suffering (particularly in Jewish history) are because of one's sins.¹⁷ One expression of *Hester Panim* is seen through God forsaking his people or hiding his face from them through divine judgement and punishment as a result of the anger of God for sinful behaviour (see, for example, Deut. 31:17-18). Following this, Berkovits identifies a second way in which this concept is expressed, through God's seeming absence during suffering inflicted by humans. The first aspect of *Hester Panim* is radically different to the latter with the first being identified as divine judgement through the sins of the people and the second where God is identified as hiding his face through suffering inflicted by his creation, '...God hiding himself mysteriously from the cry of the innocent'.¹⁸

¹⁴ Zachary. Braiterman, 'Anti/theodic Faith in the Thought of Eliezer Berkovits', *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (1), 1997, p. 85 (pp. 83-100).

¹⁵ Zachary. Braiterman, 1997, p. 88.

¹⁶ Eliezer. Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1973), p. 69.

¹⁷ See Eliezer. Berkovits, 1973, p. 94 for an elaboration on the concept of *Mipnei Hataeinu*, 'Because of our sins' and his subsequent rejection of this in view of Jewish history as a whole.

¹⁸ Eliezer. Berkovits, 1973, p. 96. Greater detail on *Hester Panim* can be found in Berkovits, pp. 94-5.

Ultimately, for Berkovits, *Hester Panim* is one of the attributes of God, who must withdraw or seem absent to maintain personal responsibility for one's actions. This attribute of the divine is described as being vital for the maintenance of free will: 'That man may be, God must absent himself; that man may not perish...God must remain present'.¹⁹ Although, it is clear that in the thought of Berkovits, God hides his face to humanity, but is still present in history. Maintaining that because of God's presence, evil will not triumph because of the hope that can be sought through God.

b. God's Presence through the Shoah

Emil Fackenheim (1916-2003) was a Reform Rabbi and professor particularly interested in themes surrounding Jewish survival post-Shoah and remembered for his philosophical response concerning the 614th commandment or 'the commanding voice'. The commanding voice forbids '...the post-Holocaust Jew to give Hitler Posthumous victories' thus they must remember the victims of the Holocaust whilst not despairing in the world or the God of Israel, for doing so would hand Hitler the victory over the Jewish people.²⁰

Fackenheim was interested in the survival of the Jewish faith by focusing on religious duty and advocated adopting an additional *mitzvah* (commandment). It is a religious duty to follow the 614th commandment, revealed in the midst of the catastrophe. It commands the Jews to survive, to remember the victims of the Shoah, to never despair of God even in the midst of such suffering and finally to not despair of the world.²¹ Fackenheim focused on these four implications of the 614th commandment to ensure the survival of the faith, the eternal memory of the martyrs and to restore order by maintaining faith in the God of the covenant.

Fackenheim makes the ultimate distinction between a redeeming voice in Auschwitz and a commanding voice, citing that there was no redeeming voice of a God who might save his people from the atrocities of the Shoah.²² Rather there is certainly a commanding voice for Fackenheim which demands that the Jews hear it and when met by absolute evil can overcome it, survive as Jews and avoid handing Hitler posthumous victories.

¹⁹ Eliezer. Berkovits, 1973, p. 107.

²⁰ Emil. Fackenheim, *To Mend The World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 299.

²¹ See Emil Fackenheim, 'The Jewish Return into History' in Michael Morgan (ed.), *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pp. 159-60).

²² See Emil Fackenheim, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust' in Michael Morgan (ed.), *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p. 165.

One might argue that for Fackenheim there is at least a limited sense of God's absence, much like the response of Berkovits; because of the seeming lack of redemptive presence. It could be argued that for Fackenheim God was somewhat hidden during the horrors of the Shoah. Were it not for the commanding voice of God demanding survival, God might have been considered totally hidden from the Jewish people at this time. Ultimately, for Fackenheim his theodicy lies in the commanding voice where God did not completely abandon his chosen people but left them the most powerful commandment in the midst of suffering denying them the opportunity to abandon faith.

Part 2 Radical Theology

Following the catastrophe of the Shoah, there were many different responses, one of which is categorised as Radical theology. These responses by individuals such as Richard Rubenstein and Ignaz Maybaum are considered radical either because of their rejection of God or their unwillingness to justify God.

a. The Death of God

Richard Rubenstein (1924-present) was a notable contributor to Holocaust theology. A conservative rabbi and later professor of religion, he is particularly influential for his Death of God theology which developed as a result of his reflections, questioning God's nature following the Shoah.

Rubenstein questions how one can believe in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God of history without regarding Hitler as an instrument of God's will and the Shoah as an expression of the divine will. Clearly, this has severe theological implications when considering the nature of God.²³ Rubenstein denies that this statement is an expression of atheism for it does not deny the existence of God, it only denies the existence of the God of the covenant. It rejects the God who intervenes in history on the basis that for Rubenstein affirming the covenant concluded that the Shoah was part of divine punishment.²⁴

Rubenstein rejects the traditional Jewish thought that God is uniquely involved in the fate of Israel, for doing so creates theological difficulty. One must speculate that if God is indeed involved in the history of Israel then God alone is ultimately responsible for the catastrophes which have befallen his chosen people including the Shoah. Therefore, Rubenstein rejects

²³ Richard. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (1st ed) (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966), p. 153.

²⁴ Richard. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (2nd ed) (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 172.

this notion of God and instead states that although one cannot provide absolute evidence that “God is dead”, we can say that ‘...we live in the time of the death of God’ where the link between heaven and earth, between humanity and God, has been broken.²⁵ As such one cannot rely on any divine power but must rely on their own resources. This is not an atheistic statement from Rubenstein, on the contrary, it recognises not the overall death of a deity which would pose questions as to the validity of one's religion and practice but affirms there is still a meaningful conception of God following the death of the God, the one who acts in history. This is further explained in later writing by Rubenstein which affirms God as being described as the “Holy Nothingness”. Thus, not suggesting that God is void but that ‘...all existence derives from his very essence. God as the *Nothing* is not absence of being but superfluity of being.’²⁶

b. Hitler as God's Servant

Ignaz Maybaum (1897-1976) was a Reform rabbi and theologian particularly interested in Holocaust theology and known particularly for his radical view of Hitler acting as a divine servant. Maybaum cites the other historical Jewish catastrophes namely the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and the destruction in 70 CE by the Romans and charts progress made after each which, in his view, act as small moments in history when balanced with the eternal love of God.

Maybaum draws attention to a phrase used in Jeremiah 27:6 saying ‘Nebuchadnezzar...my servant’ and replaces this biblical passage with ‘Hitler, my Servant’. Here Maybaum states that just as Nebuchadnezzar was used by God for destructive purposes so to Hitler was called by God and used ‘...to cleanse, to purify, to punish a sinful world; the six million Jews, they died an innocent death; they died because of the sins of other’.²⁷ Although Maybaum maintains the innocence of the victims, this view of Hitler has quite severe ramifications on the nature of God. God allowed such a catastrophe to happen to his chosen people, his innocent victims, martyrs and sacrificial lambs. For Maybaum, humans are responsible for each other's fate, including the righteous being responsible for the fate of sinners as is the

²⁵ Richard. Rubenstein, 1966, pp. 151-2.

²⁶ Richard. L. Rubenstein and John. K. Roth, *Approaches To Auschwitz: The Legacy of the Holocaust* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1987), p. 315.

²⁷ Ignaz. Maybaum, ‘The Face of God after Auschwitz’ in Dan. Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), *Holocaust Theology: A Reader* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), p. 97.

case in the Shoah where the victims died to purify Western civilization that hope for a new future may arise.²⁸

This response by Maybaum is not an isolated one within Holocaust theology as a whole. Rubenstein, for example, recalls a German Christian opponent to the Nazis, Henrich Gruber, who also affirmed that Hitler acted as an agent of God's will in murdering six million Jews. Gruber cited Hebrew Bible passages such as Jeremiah 27:6 and Psalm 44:22 which affirms that God is the Lord and master of one's destiny and his will must be done.²⁹

Maybaum's response provides a very nuanced theological argument as one might expect Maybaum to be somewhat divine rejecting or despairing in the God of the covenant (even rejecting the covenant) given that Hitler, the perpetrator of such unthinkable evil is regarded as God's servant. However, the theological perspective presented is almost in complete contrast to this. Maybaum continues to affirm the validity of a covenantal relationship between God and his people. He affirms that God intervenes in history and intervened in the Shoah.

Maybaum uses the model of the crucifixion of Jesus as his explanation for the innocence of the victims and although he '...sees the Holocaust as God's deliberate intervention, he rejects the idea that it was in any sense a divine punishment'.³⁰ In using the crucifixion as an example, Maybaum sees this as a way to address the issue of the Shoah in terms which people may understand in that, just as Jesus died an innocent death making salvation possible, the victims of the Shoah also remain innocent sacrifices.

Once again, Maybaum remains deliberate in his rather provocative theological style as a rabbi who uses the example of Jesus' crucifixion as a tool for explaining the Shoah writing 'The Golgotha of modern mankind is Auschwitz. The cross, the Roman gallows, was replaced by the gas chamber'.³¹ This theological response to the Shoah is provocative as he uses one of the most crucial Christian events in the crucifixion of Jesus to help explain the Shoah even though Jews themselves have always rejected Jesus as the Messiah.

Ultimately, for Maybaum, this was creative destruction, a divine intervention based on God's everlasting covenant with Israel. It was an innocent catastrophe with Hitler at the centre as an

²⁸ Dan. Cohn-Sherbok (ed.), 2002, p. 98.

²⁹ See Richard. Rubenstein, 1992, pp. 3-13 for more detail on Heinrich Gruber.

³⁰ Richard. L. Rubenstein and John. K. Roth, 1987, p. 303.

³¹ Ignaz. Maybaum, *The Face of God After Auschwitz* (Amsterdam: Polak and Vaan Gennep, 1965), p. 36.

instrument of God to bring the world into the modern age, because of the sins of others resulting in further dispersion of the Jews where they may become free to participate in a fully rational modernity and a global Judaism.

c. The Abusive God

David Blumenthal (1938), a Jewish scholar, presents a deeply interesting theological response to the Shoah. In his book *Facing the Abusing God* (1993) he combines a response to the Shoah with reflections on child abuse where he argues that to maintain faith after the Shoah one must understand that the attributes of God include capability for unjust acts which can be considered abusive as well as the more conventional divine attributes associated with God such as a loving and kind God.

Blumenthal cites several biblical passages in support of an abusing God who ultimately allowed the Shoah, for example, Psalm 44:23-24: 'Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?' and Genesis 6:7: "I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created...for I am sorry that I have made them." For Blumenthal, these passages show a clear understanding that the divine attributes of God should include the angry, unjust character of God as 'If I am violated, then He is the Perpetrator. If I must do intimate battle, then He is the Adversary... God is the Abuser, and we are the abused'.³² Blumenthal concedes that one must accept this characterisation of God and develop a new theology of protest where we question the treatment of his people in response to modern atrocities and God's involvement. Thus, Blumenthal's theology centres around questioning God rather than blindly justifying historical events on the basis of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent divine being who does not make mistakes. More practically, he does question God, he tells him if he is in the wrong and even appears to fear God on the basis that 'He can wipe me out in a time of indifference of a time of irrational anger'.³³ In characterizing God as sometimes abusive, Blumenthal challenges the traditional Judeo-Christian understanding of God.

Moreover, Blumenthal maintains God's active presence in history and the Shoah itself not by absolving human guilt and evil in the events surrounding the Shoah but by acknowledging that God was co-responsible.³⁴ Finally, Blumenthal informs of five main reflections namely,

³² David. R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 155.

³³ David. R. Blumenthal, 1993, p. 198.

³⁴ See David. R. Blumenthal, 1993, pp. 261-62 for more detailed discussion of Gods involvement.

1) that we are the victims of unjust suffering and God alone is responsible, 2) one should distance themselves from the Perpetrator, 3) one must accuse the abuser exposing the truth, 4) we shall be empowered by our very survival and finally 5) we shall affirm our faith in the reality of God's presence and love knowing the reality of his imperfect nature.³⁵

Part 3 The Religious Challenge

As has already been discussed above, there are a variety of responses which emerged following the Shoah. However, it is integral to understand the catastrophe from the perspective of a survivor in order to truly understand the magnitude of the evil endured during the Shoah. One such survivor, Elie Wiesel considers the religious challenge of the Shoah through the natural doubt of the divine in response to such unspeakable evil. His essential question being of central importance for many survivors, theologians and philosophers wrestling with the Shoah, where was God?

a. The Doubt of the Survivor

As Berkovits often alluded to, one cannot begin to comprehend the effect that the Shoah had on the faith of those who experienced it, who witnessed first-hand the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis, who lived through the Shoah and ultimately survived. One such Jewish survivor of the Shoah was Elie Wiesel (1928-2016) who was imprisoned in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps during World War Two and having survived began to write about his experiences. One of the most famous examples of such writing is "Night" which details Wiesel's experiences with his father in the concentration camps. He details his doubt of God, his anger, his authentic rebellion against faith in the God of the Jewish people.

One rather chilling example that Elie Wiesel recalls is where the SS hung a young boy in front of a crowd of spectators and he recalls the agonising period when the boy was hanging there, still barely alive, struggling between life and death. Wiesel recalls the challenge of one of the spectators pleading "Where is God now?", Wiesel's internal response was 'Here He is- He is hanging here on this gallows...' ³⁶ It is through this and other ordeals which took place during Wiesel's time in the concentration camps which lead to the erosion of his faith. The internal doubts soon became external, expressed particularly through his and many others' rebellion against God during Jewish festivals in the camps.

³⁵ See David. R. Blumenthal, 1993, pp. 266-67 for a more detailed analysis of Blumenthal's observations.

³⁶ Elie Wiesel, *Night* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd, 1981), p. 77.

An example of the real doubt and erosion of Wiesel's faith is on the eve of *Rosh Hashanah*. During a benedictory prayer, Wiesel neglected to bless the name of God and rebelled. As Wiesel explains '...he had thousands of children burned in his pits...in his great might he had created Auschwitz'.³⁷ Many did bless the name of God, but it is to be expected that Wiesel would not have been the only one who refused or who did not authentically believe at that moment in the words that they were saying. In the face of such brutality, having experienced unthinkable evil, those who rebelled cannot be blamed. It was during this time in Wiesel's life that he felt a real faith-damaging silence from God and began to blame him. After all, why would an all-loving God allow such things to happen to his chosen people?

Conclusion

The theological and philosophical challenge that the Shoah presented (and continues to present) the Jewish faith was ultimately unprecedented. It is understandable that such an act of unexplainable evil perpetrated against the Jewish people would have such an impact on modern Jewry, attitudes to God and theology as a whole. As has been discussed above, there are a variety of responses to the Shoah. These include those such as Berkovits who would wish to absolve God of some of the guilt that some of the more radical theological thinkers might argue God should be feeling. Berkovits argues that God is not absent but rather hidden from the cries of his people due to a divine characteristic integral to the upholding of human free will. Further examples of theodicy came from Fackenheim who maintained faith through the 614th commandment to survive and the commanding voice showing that God had not completely abandoned his people.

The more radical theological and philosophical responses come from individuals such as Richard Rubenstein and Ignaz Maybaum, Rubenstein, who formed views surrounding the death of God where the link between heaven and earth, God and his people has been broken. Maybaum held that Hitler was used as God's instrument in an act of creative catastrophe, a divine intervention bringing the world into the modern age as a result of the sins of others. Coupled with the theological doubting and questioning of Ellie Wiesel and David Blumenthal, the hurt and doubt of the survivor and the blame for the abusive God from the Jewish scholar help one to understand the real implications that the Shoah has had on European Jewry.

³⁷ Elie Wiesel, 1981, p.78.

Chapter 3: Comparing the Theological and Philosophical Responses from 70 CE and 1945

Introduction

In this chapter, I will be analysing the nature of the responses to the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE and responses to the Shoah to see if there are any parallels that can be found and if there are any differences in the responses to attempt to explain why this is the case. To achieve this aim, I will be utilizing the material presented in the previous two chapters.

These two events represent the greatest catastrophes to have befallen the Jewish people and as such have prompted major theological and philosophical questioning. The nature of the two catastrophes albeit not frequently have been compared previously³⁸, however, some of the similarities remain difficult to draw out. Often the Shoah is seen by many scholars as having a more profound impact on Jewry in terms of its theological and philosophical implications.

The focus on theodicy and upholding of the covenant seems to have parallels for both catastrophes with both seemingly having an impact on the future of the great agreement between the Jewish people and God. Josephus, for example, maintains belief in a covenantal relationship with God and it is clear throughout his writings that his faith in this relationship has not been shattered by the event as God is identified as bringing the event into fruition by way of divine punishment for the sins of the Jewish tyrants. In a similar manner, there is a focus on theodicy and covenant in the response of Eliezer Berkovits to the Shoah where he expands on *Hester Panim* as being an attribute of the divine, where at times, God must seem absent from humanity and more specifically, absent from the innocent in times of affliction. This, maintains Berkovits, is necessary for the upholding of free will.

The nature of such theodicy and covenant are quite different as responses to the destruction of the Temple blame the Jewish tyrants in Josephus' case and insist divine punishment is in play (cf. 4 Ezra: Blaming the evil heart, 2 Baruch: disobedience to God's law). Even the more radical of thinkers such as Blumenthal (claiming that we are victims of unjust suffering perpetrated by God) does not despair completely in God despite his characterisation as an abusive God. For Blumenthal, accepting God's imperfect nature allows one to affirm our

³⁸ For comparisons see David. Weiss. Halivni, pp. 27-31 who discusses the impact of the two catastrophes but ultimately concludes there can be no comparison due to the Shoah's unprecedented nature. (Cf. Baruch Bokser esp. 59-61; Klawans, 2010, pp. 307-209).

faith in the covenant, in the knowledge that we may question divine involvement in atrocities knowing his imperfect nature.³⁹

It is also arguable that the experiences of the Jewish people throughout great catastrophes in their history and their survival at the very least must provide hope to Jewry experiencing great evil or hardship. Of course, it may be hard to make an outright comparison to the radically different nature of the other Jewish catastrophes to the Shoah. However, hope for the future and Jewish survival have been extremely important theological and philosophical responses which have emerged from these events. For example, in the apocalyptic texts of 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra, there is a specific emphasis on the survival of the Jewish community. The author's questioning subsides once they learn of God's plans for the future, finding eschatological promises in the future. If the Jewish people remain faithful to the Torah, they will reap the rewards from the good and gracious God described in 2 Baruch 77:7.

This is comparable to Emil Fackenheim's insistence on Jewish survival through religious duty and the 614th commandment where one cannot hand Hitler Posthumous victories.

Fackenheim's response encourages Jews to survive and not to despair in the God of Israel for he did not abandon them in the death camps during the Shoah, rather, God can be seen as the commanding voice demanding survival.

While there are parallels to be drawn out in terms of the responses to these two great catastrophes, there are also significant differences. The emergence of radical theology seems to be a significant development in the responses, associated more with the Shoah rather than the destruction of the Temple with Maybaum, Blumenthal and Rubenstein making important contributions. These radical responses are concerned with the rejection or blaming of God for the Shoah either for his direct involvement or his negligence in not intervening (e.g. Blumenthal: the abusive God; cf. Maybaum: Hitler as God's instrument).

This kind of theological response does not seem to take hold during the events of 70 CE, although there times of serious despair and questioning of God in the apocalyptic texts, it does not escalate to the extent of Rubenstein in surmising the death of God and the breaking of the link between heaven and earth. Is it the Shoah's unprecedented nature representing unspeakable evil towards the Jewish faith that constituted a more radical approach to the nature of God? After all, the Shoah is often seen as a catastrophe which cannot be explained through traditional paradigms of theological and philosophical thought.⁴⁰

³⁹ See David. R. Blumenthal, 1993, p. 284.

⁴⁰ See for example Jonathan. Klawans, 'Josephus, the Rabbis, and Responses to Catastrophes Ancient and Modern', in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 100 (2), 2010, p. 309 (pp. 278-309).

If one were to make a comparison between the radical theology of the Shoah and responses to the destruction in 70 CE, one might use the argument advanced by Maybaum that Hitler acted as God's servant, carrying out divine punishment and thus the victims of the Shoah died for the sins of others. One might add that there is a logical extension to this argument by Maybaum which may be used for Josephus' own theological response to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Josephus' insisted that divine punishment took effect for the sins of the Jewish tyrants (see the Jewish War, preface: 10) and the Romans were rendered "unwilling participants" in an action which would have been carried out with or without them. If one carried this notion out to its logical, radical conclusion could one change the once provocative wording used by Maybaum and use Jeremiah 27:6 in the following way: "Titus...my servant". Could Josephus' response in this respect represent his well-known bias towards the Romans (after all he did pledge allegiance to the Romans), or does this represent his unwavering belief in divine punishment? If it is the latter, then perhaps the more radical sentiment "Titus...my servant" may only be more provocative wording for Josephus' standpoint on the catastrophe.

As identified above there is a significant difference in the nature of the responses to the Shoah and the destruction in 70 CE with the development of radical theology. One must question why there is such a difference in the responses to the two catastrophes and whether it a difference in the nature of the two events that gave rise to radical theology in the latter event.

One could argue that the fall of the second Temple had less devastating implications on the Jewish faith than the Shoah, simply because it was the second time that this had happened albeit with more serious consequences the second time. The fall of the first Temple in 587 BCE and the rejuvenation of the Jewish faith and rebuilding of the Temple which followed must have prepared them to endure a similar (however more devastating) catastrophe. After all, both apocalyptic texts written after the destruction in 70 CE set themselves during the Babylonian exile thus appealing to a familiar setting of hardship for the Jewish people coming to terms with the aftermath of the destruction in 70 CE. As 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch attests, however, that did not make the destruction any less traumatic.

There is a tendency to want to make an outright comparison between the destruction of the first and second Temples and the Shoah. However, there is a school of thought which argues that comparisons may not be valid, arguing that this event cannot be viewed in the conventional forms of Jewish philosophical and theological frameworks. Jonathan Klawans argues that in linking Jewish catastrophes to one another, contemporary Jews are attempting

to seek solace in the knowledge that earlier Jews encountered and overcome a similarly unprecedented event in their history. This view is misguided according to Klawans, as if the Shoah should stand on its own as a mammoth, unexplainable event in Jewish history then it cannot be adequately compared with other catastrophes for ‘the unprecedented should have no precedent; the unique cannot be compared’.⁴¹

Emil Fackenheim argues for the uniqueness of the Shoah not so much in the sense that it is a greater crime than others in history but for Fackenheim the Shoah presents a unique challenge to himself and European Jewry. The very fact that Fackenheim spoke of a 614th commandment alludes to the point that the traditional 613 commandments and Jewish theology as a whole were not equipped enough to deal with the magnitude of the Shoah, and this event in its unique nature demanded a new theological framework.⁴² The unique nature presents itself in the differences of the responses between the two catastrophes.

Similarly, David Halivni argues for the unique nature of the Shoah where human evil reached its pinnacle and unlike other catastrophes (e.g. the destruction of the second Temple), the intent to destroy anything Jewish took away any chance of escape for anyone Jewish was destined for destruction. Crucially, Halivni denies the comparison between the Shoah and both the first and second Temple, taking the view that the Shoah is superior for the scale of destruction and in the sense that it was motivated by pure hatred. Although he recognises the implications of the destruction in 70 CE with the ceasing of sacrificial services and the centre of Jewish worship being wiped out, Halivni doubts whether the destruction led to a weakening in their spiritual life due to their increased importance on study of the Torah and the shift in Jewish worship to the Synagogue.⁴³

It is argued by Michael Wyschogrod that the insistence on maintaining (certainly for world history) the uniqueness of the Shoah may come at the expense of diminishing other occasions of great human suffering (e.g. Hiroshima, the destruction in 70 CE). Therefore one must recognise that certainly for the non-believer ‘...the destruction of European Jewry is one notable chapter in the long record of man’s inhumanity against man, a record which compels the Holocaust to resign itself to being, at most, a first among equals’.⁴⁴ Rather than

⁴¹ Jonathan. Klawans, 2010, p. 282.

⁴² Emil. Fackenheim, 1994, p. 10.

⁴³ David. Weiss. Halivni, *Breaking The Tablets: Jewish Theology After the Shoah* (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), p. 28.

⁴⁴ Michael. Wyschogrod, ‘Faith and the Holocaust’, in *Judaism: American Jewish Congress*, Vol. 20 (3), 1971, p. 292 (pp. 286-94). [Online]. Available at: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1304358598?accountid=130472> [Accessed: 03 May 2019].

completely rejecting the unprecedented nature of the Shoah, Wyschogrod argues that for the believer, the importance of the Shoah, its memory and implications will be paramount. However, for the non-believer, it may just mark a point in the history of unexplainable, tragic human evil which if it demands anything at all, it is to take a stand against evil and injustice.⁴⁵

Conclusion

There is ultimately a significant difference between the responses to the destruction of the second Temple and the Shoah primarily because the latter is such an unprecedented event in human history. Whether considering the sheer number of victims, the motive (to destroy an entire people) or the method (the final solution), the more contemporary catastrophe seems to take precedent.

Klawans argues that possibly the greatest contrast between the two catastrophes is a question which took hold of Holocaust studies: ‘is the Holocaust a unique event in human experience?’⁴⁶ Whether this is the case or not, it remains that during the fall of the second Temple, whether the catastrophe was a unique event was not of particular concern after the destruction in 70 CE. The Shoah represented more pressing, unspeakable evil and required a theological and philosophical response unlike what was needed in the past. Many academics and scholars sought a new theological and philosophical framework to answer some of the most difficult questions concerning the role of God in the catastrophe and the survival of the Jewish faith (see Rubenstein for example).

It is extremely difficult to make direct comparisons between the responses to the two destructions, possibly because of their tremendous gaps in time frames, but primarily because of the impact of the Shoah on European Jewry. One cannot belittle the great suffering experienced by those in 70 CE with many Jews killed, the Temple (the focal point of the faith) in ruins and the sacrificial services ceased. Indeed, many Jewish lives were shattered by the destruction, many would have lost faith (even temporarily), however it seems that the turn from despair to hope in the apocalyptic texts and the theodicy by Josephus would have provided comfort to the Jewish community at the time and as such did not encompass a tragedy that could shatter a religion.

Conversely, the merciless attempted annihilation of the Jews by the Nazis and the approximate six million Jewish lives lost, for many represented a near shattering of the

⁴⁵ See Michael. Wyschogrod, 1971, p. 293 for a more detailed analysis of the Shoah’s unprecedented/unique nature.

⁴⁶ Jonathan. Klawans, 2010, p. 308.

religion. Though, evidently, some have found hope in the midst of despair. The traditional theology had to be adapted into a new framework unmatched by any other catastrophe, certainly in Jewish history. Yet the traditional themes of theodicy, covenant, and Jewish survival (albeit in a different form) continued to be important for the Jewish religion. Importantly, while there are similarities to be seen in terms of the responses to the two catastrophes, there are also major differences because of the unprecedented nature of the Shoah. Ultimately, the Shoah must stand for Jews as the central, unprecedented catastrophe to have struck their religion for ‘There is a hierarchy even among tragedies, and the tragedy that met our generation belongs at the top’.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ David. Weiss. Halivni, 2007, p. 31.

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