

lated to the life cycle and a sense of shared historical experience. No matter how tenuous the faith of average Jews or Christians, they normally find their inherited tradition the most suitable vehicle for consecrating such events as the birth of a child or a marriage. In a crisis such as the death of a parent or child, the need to turn to the rituals of an inherited tradition is even more urgent.

Although in 1966 I had become convinced that there is a void where once God's presence had been experienced, it did not follow that Judaism had lost its meaning or power or that a theistic God of covenant and election is necessary for Jewish religious life, at least for the first and second post-Holocaust generations. Dietrich Bonhoeffer had written that our problem is how to speak of God in an age of no religion. I saw the problem as how to speak of religion in an age of the absence of God. Judaism can be understood as the way Jews share the decisive times and crises of life through the traditions of their inherited community. The need for that sharing is not diminished in the time of the death of God. If it is no longer possible to believe in the God who has the power to annul the tragedies of existence, the need religiously to share that existence remains. In place of the biblical image of God as transcending the world he has created, I came to believe that a view of God which gives priority to immanence may be more credible in our era. I discuss this issue in a subsequent chapter.²⁷

In mysticism and dialectic pantheism I found a view of God I could affirm after Auschwitz. Ironically, by virtue of His, or perhaps Its, all-encompassing nature, the God who is the Source and Ground of Being is as much a God-who-acts-in-history as the transcendent Creator God of the Bible, as any reader of Hegel would understand. What the dialectical-mystical interpretation excludes is the distinctive ascription of guilt to Israel and the category of divinely inflicted punishment to the Holocaust. *Creative destruction and even destruction transcending the categories of good and evil may be inherent in the life of Divinity, but not punitive destruction.*

The dialectical-mystical elements in my thinking have endured, the pagan element has proven less durable. In the aftermath of the Shoah, with the rebirth of an independent Jewish state for the first time since the Judeo-Roman wars, there was a certain plausibility to the argument that a people that is at home lives a very different kind of life than a band of wandering strangers. During the whole period of their wanderings, the vast majority of the Jewish people prayed that they might be restored to the land of their origin. Wherever they dwell in the Diaspora their lives

and their safety were wholly dependent upon the tolerance of others. During the two thousand years of the Diaspora, Jewish history always had a goal, namely, return to the homeland. That goal was given expression in prayers originally written in the aftermath of the Judeo-Roman Wars and still recited three times daily in the traditional liturgy.²⁸

With his nineteenth-century Reform Jewish ideas about the "mission of Israel," Maybaum rejected the spirit of these prayers, arguing that the Diaspora was "progress" and an integral part of God's plan for humanity. By contrast, I identified the Diaspora as a form of communal alienation and further argued that the Holocaust had demonstrated how hazardous it is for any people to be utterly dependent for their security on a majority that regarded them as religiously and culturally alien, especially in times of acute political, social, or economic stress.

If Jewish history had as its goal return to the land of Israel, Jewish history appeared to have, at least in principle, come to an end when that goal had been attained in 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel. It may have made sense to worship a God of history while Jewish history was unfulfilled, that is, while Jews still envisioned the goal of their history as return to Israel in the distant future. The Jewish situation changed radically when that goal appeared to have been attained. Not only did Jewish history seem to have come to an end, but after Auschwitz the God of History was no longer credible. In the biblical period, whenever the people had felt at home in the land, they turned to the earth gods of Canaan. Biblical monotheism had effectively defeated polytheism but not necessarily nature paganism. After Auschwitz and the return to Israel, the God of Nature, or more precisely the God who manifests Himself, so to speak, in and through nature was the God to whom the Jews would turn in place of the God of History, especially in Israel. This is consistent with the view that religion is essentially the way we share the crisis moments, that is, the turning points, of both the life cycle and the calendar. My rejection of the biblical God of History led me to a modified form of nature paganism.

With the passing of time, however, the pagan spirit that predominated in *After Auschwitz* receded into the background. That paganism was inextricably linked to the idea that a significant portion of the Jewish people was "at home" in the land of Israel. However, most of the world's Jews were not "at home" in Israel. Even those domiciled within its borders were ever mindful that the fragile state and its people could be annihilated were Israel's neighbors ever to win a single decisive military victory. Moreover, the majority of the Jews of the Diaspora had no desire

to settle there. Clearly, the "goal" of Jewish history had not been reached and Jewish history was not at an end. On the contrary, having returned, the people of Israel may be faced with the prospect of an unending, non-negotiable life-and-death struggle against an implacable league of enemies. There may be intermittent periods of relative peace, but the historical model governing the Arab view of Israel remains that of the Crusades.

CHAPTER 9

Covenant and Divinity

THE HOLOCAUST AND THE PROBLEMATICS OF RELIGIOUS FAITH, PART 2

Emil L. Fackenheim

The first theological response to the Holocaust that was received with widespread favor within the Jewish community was that of Emil L. Fackenheim (b. 1918), a Reform Rabbi and a distinguished philosopher who left his native Germany in 1939 and spent the major portion of his career teaching philosophy at the University of Toronto.

Fackenheim's thinking about God and the Holocaust must be seen against the background of his fundamental religious position. Fackenheim believes that both Judaism and Christianity affirm an "actual Divine Presence" that can and does manifest itself in the real world. This Presence is neither an intellectual hypothesis about God nor a mere subjective feeling on the part of the believer. It is the Presence *par excellence*, a Presence that is revealed in Scripture but hardly confined to it. Fackenheim has written that "in a genuine divine-human encounter—if and when it occurs—Divinity is immediately present to the believer."¹ Fackenheim explicitly denies that the social sciences have any constructive role in comprehending the Presence. The Presence is a real, not an imaginary or projected, datum of the believer. The Presence can be met; it cannot be argued into or out of existence. Fackenheim's religious thought, including his reflections on the Holocaust, can thus be seen as an attempt to spell out the consequences for contemporary religious faith of the experience of the Divine Presence.

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has evolved considerably as his own reflections about and knowledge of the Holocaust have deepened. Fackenheim has written that for more than twenty years he was convinced that the Holocaust was not a theological problem for Judaism. Judaism, he argued, was subject to no historical refutation until the time of the Messiah.² In the late sixties, he changed his mind: "Doubtless the greatest doctrinal change in my whole career came with the view that at least *Jewish* faith is, after all, *not absolutely* immune to *all* empirical events" (italics added).³

Recently, Fackenheim has elaborated on that change, expressing agreement with Rabbi Yitzhak (Irving) Greenberg's observation, cited in the previous chapter, that "the Holocaust poses the most radical counter-testimony to both Judaism and Christianity. . . . The cruelty and the killing raise the question whether even those who believe after such an event dare to talk about a God who loves and cares without making a mockery of those who suffered."⁴ Fackenheim's view of revelation is quite different from the traditional view.⁵ Fackenheim emphatically rejects the idea that the Holocaust was divine punishment. Moreover, he is no more able to accept the doctrine of covenant and election *as understood by Orthodox Jews or Christian fundamentalists* than I. Fackenheim's idea of the Divine Presence is by no means identical with the traditional biblical-rabbinic God, who rewards obedience to his commandments and punishes disobedience. Fackenheim also rejects Maybaum's idea that the victims were in any sense sacrificial offerings.

As early as 1951 Fackenheim distinguished the *presence* of Divinity from the *explicit content* of the covenant:

Revelation thus remains a mystery even while it is being revealed, and every single word spoken by any prophet is inexorably shot through with human interpretation. Franz Rosenzweig observed: "Revelation is not identical with legislation; it is, in itself, nothing but the act of revelation itself, properly speaking, it is completed with the word *unveiled* (and He descended); even *unveiler* (and He spoke) is already human interpretation. . . . Orthodoxy identifies the human—if ancient—interpretation of revelation with revelation itself. . . . All interpretation of revelation is human."⁶

The above passage points to a fundamental difference between my position and Fackenheim's. I am a native-born American who has been more deeply and persistently influenced by conservative American Protestantism than Fackenheim. While in no sense rejecting the idea that the text of Scripture requires interpretation, *I am convinced that when one is confronted with doctrinal issues as fundamental as God's relation to Israel, the "plain meaning of Scripture" must be taken very seriously.* If Scripture depicts

God as demanding Israel's obedience on pain of dire punishment for disobedience, we cannot soften the intent of the text because we are embarrassed by its modern application, namely, that Hitler is to be seen as a modern Nebuchadnezzar. On the contrary, we are faced with a choice that can neither be evaded nor glossed over: *either Scripture's account of the covenant is credible, or, however we understand God, Divinity is not the biblical God—who-acts-in-history-and-chooses-Israel.* My Berlin meeting with Dean Grüber was decisive because both of us took the plain meaning of Scripture seriously. Grüber accepted its meaning. I had too much respect for the integrity of the text to water down its meaning. Since I could not accept Hitler as a modern "rod of God's anger," there was no alternative save rejection of the biblical doctrine of covenant and election.

In reality, Fackenheim also rejects the *literal* biblical doctrine, although he continues to employ Scriptural imagery *as if* he affirmed the old tradition. This is neither dishonesty nor evasion. It represents an honorable and creative but very different approach to religious faith, an approach that holds that all revelation is mediated by believers who stand in a particular historical context and who reflect that context in the way they understand and testify to their encounter with Divinity. As we shall see, for Fackenheim the context in which the Jewish people experience the Divine Presence after Auschwitz is radically different than it was before.

In his early writings Fackenheim expressed no doubt that God was present at the Holocaust, as indeed He had been encountered in all of the decisive moments of Israel's history. According to Fackenheim, God has revealed Himself in Jewish history through a series of "root experiences," events of such decisive character that they influenced all subsequent periods of Jewish life. These "root experiences" include the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Both at the Red Sea and at Sinai, Israel experienced the saving activity of God, which shaped her character ever after. At Sinai the saving God was also experienced as a commanding God. Moreover, in every age Israel has recollected these "root experiences" not as events of a long-vanished past but as present assurances that "the saving God of the past saves still."⁷

In addition to "root experiences," Fackenheim held that Israel experienced "epoch-making events" that have tested and challenged the "root experiences" with new and terrible situations. The destruction of Jerusalem, first by the Babylonians and then by the Romans, constituted such epoch-making events. In both cases, the test was met. In spite of the overwhelming nature of the tragedies, first the prophets and then the rabbis taught their community to hold fast to their faith in God's presence

in history and to their hope that God would redeem Israel in the future as he had in the past. These were by no means the only epoch-making events. Throughout the long night of the Diaspora, Israel's "root experiences" were tested over and over again. In every instance, Israel reaffirmed its commitment to the "saving and commanding" God of the Exodus and Sinai.

According to Fackenheim, the Holocaust was the most radically disorienting "epoch-making event" in all of Jewish history. Insisting that the Jewish people must respond to this shattering challenge with a reaffirmation of God's presence in history, Fackenheim acknowledged that it is impossible to affirm God's *saving* presence at Auschwitz. Nevertheless, he insisted that while no "redeeming Voice" was heard at Auschwitz, a "commanding Voice" was heard and that the "commanding Voice" enunciated a "614th commandment."⁸ The new commandment is said to be that "the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another victory."⁹ Fackenheim has spelled out the content of the 614th commandment:

We are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the people of Israel perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with Him or with belief in Him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other posthumous victories.¹⁰

Probably no passage written by a contemporary Jewish religious thinker has become as well known as this. It struck a deep chord in Jews of every social level and religious commitment. Most of Fackenheim's writing is on a philosophic and theological level that is beyond the competence of the ordinary layman. Not so this passage, which is largely responsible for the fact that Fackenheim's interpretation of the Holocaust has become so influential within the Jewish community. A people that has endured catastrophic defeat is likely to see the survival of their community and its traditions as a supreme priority. Fackenheim gave this aspiration the status of a divine command. Instead of questioning whether the traditional Jewish understanding of God could be maintained after Auschwitz, Fackenheim insisted that God's Presence to Israel, *even in the death camps*, was not to be challenged on pain of being considered a posthumous accomplice of the worst destroyer the Jews

have ever known. The passion and the psychological power of this position is undeniable. There were, however, unfortunate consequences. Those Jews "who denied or despaired" of the Scriptural God were cast in the role of accomplices of Hitler. Given the influence of Fackenheim's ideas within the Jewish community, that was a matter of considerable seriousness. Moreover, Fackenheim went so far as to suggest that those who did not hear the "commanding Voice" at Auschwitz were *wilfully* rejecting God: "In my view, nothing less will do than to say that a commanding Voice speaks from Auschwitz, and that there are Jews who hear it and Jews who *stop their ears* (italics added)."¹¹

Fackenheim excluded or ignored the possibility that some Jews might honestly be unable to believe that God was in any way present at Auschwitz, no matter how metaphorically the idea is presented. To stop one's ears is, after all, a deliberate act. The practical consequence of Fackenheim's insistence that the "commanding Voice" prohibited Jews to deny or despair of God has been to limit meaningful theological debate on the Holocaust within the Jewish community to those who could affirm, as did Fackenheim, that the God of Israel was somehow present at Auschwitz. Instead of seeing the Holocaust as the shared trauma that had shaken every Jew, and certainly every Jewish theologian, to the core of his or her being, following Fackenheim's lead the community has tended to treat theological dissenters as if they had handed Hitler "yet other posthumous victories." I do not regard Fackenheim as responsible for this development. Nevertheless, his description of the commanding Voice at Auschwitz gave expression to a deep-seated Jewish response to the Holocaust and defined the limits beyond which the community was apparently unwilling to tolerate theological debate.

In spite of its power, Fackenheim's position was not without difficulty even for the tradition he sought to defend. Given his conviction that revelation was inseparable from interpretation, it is not clear whether the "commanding Voice" was a real or a metaphorical event. There is now reason to believe that Fackenheim would reject both alternatives and would hold that the commandment would have been unreal without an affirmative Jewish response. One could, however, ask those who took it as a real event whether they or anyone else had actually heard the commanding Voice enunciate the 614th commandment during the Holocaust years. If language is to have any reliable meaning, *something* resembling the content described by Fackenheim had to be communicated to somebody who thereafter testified to his or her experience. Taken literally, it did not appear that anybody heard the 614th commandment, as indeed Fackenheim's recent description of how he came to write the passage

would indicate. In *To Mend the World* (1982), Fackenheim told his readers that after he had come to the conclusion that the Holocaust was a radical challenge to Jewish faith, "My first response was to formulate the 614th commandment."¹²

Still, Fackenheim's language appeared to convey the idea that a precise content had been conveyed at Auschwitz by a real commanding Voice. Moreover, Fackenheim seemed to have overlooked the fact that in Judaism only God or a prophet acting as God's agent can formulate a divine imperative.

Fackenheim's critics also found considerable difficulty with his assertion that the commanding Voice had enjoined Jews to "survive as Jews." In the case of traditional Jews, no such commandment was necessary. They have always believed that Jewish religious survival was a divine imperative and had no need of an Auschwitz to receive such an injunction. In the case of secularized Jews, the "614th commandment" appeared to be a case of pedagogic overkill. It hardly seemed likely that even a jealous God would require the annihilation of six million Jews as the occasion for a commandment forbidding Jews to permit the demise of their tradition.

Perhaps the most questionable aspect of the "614th commandment" was the injunction not to deny or despair of God lest Hitler be given "yet other posthumous victories." Here Fackenheim confronted the fundamental issue of Holocaust theology, but whereas other theologians attempted, each in his own way, to offer a view of God that was not at odds with the empirical evidence of history, Fackenheim told his readers what God was alleged to have commanded.

Does that mean that Fackenheim had perpetrated a fiction in order to maintain the theological integrity of his reading of Judaism? I do not regard this as worthy of consideration. Given Fackenheim's faith in the Divine Presence, there was simply no way he could have thought of God as absent from Auschwitz. It was impossible to speak of a saving Presence at Auschwitz. Yet, utter defeat and annihilation could not be the last word. A way out of the ashes had to be found. The "614th commandment" expressed what most religious Jews regard as their sacred obligation in response to the Holocaust. In the language of Jewish faith, that response could most appropriately be communicated in the imagery of the commandments. As we have observed, the "614th commandment" is religiously and existentially problematic. That, however, is beside the point. It is perhaps best to see Fackenheim's 614th commandment as a *cri de coeur transmitted into the language of the sacred*. That would at least help to explain why it has touched so many Jews so deeply.

In *To Mend the World* Fackenheim returned to the problem of the Holocaust as a radical "countertestimony" to religious faith. Although he did not reject the notion of a commanding Voice at Auschwitz, his response to the Holocaust had lost the dogmatic edge it seemed to have a decade earlier. More than ever he emphasized the fact that the Holocaust was not a "relapse into barbarism" but "a total rupture" with the previously accepted values of Judaism, Christianity, and Western philosophy. His view is largely in accord with that of George Kern and Leon Rappoport, who have written that the Holocaust is a crisis in human behavior of such dimensions that all of the guidance mechanisms of Western society, "institutions of law, religion and obligation," proved impotent in meeting it.¹³ According to Fackenheim, not only did these institutions fail to respond to the crisis, but in the ensuing years they have largely taken the path of escapism in treating the Holocaust as if it were an unfortunate incident that requires neither self-examination nor serious inquiry into how to prevent its repetition. Fackenheim insists that there can be no mending of the rupture unless the full measure of the catastrophe is understood.

Regrettably, I have come to the conclusion that the Holocaust was not the complete rupture with the values of Western religion and philosophy depicted by Fackenheim. On the contrary, given the radical demonization of the Jews in traditional Christian thought and the just-war tradition that legitimates whatever measures are necessary to combat a mortal enemy, once the Nazis succeeded in convincing a majority of Europeans that the Jews were a mortal threat to Christian civilization, it became morally acceptable for normal men and women to participate in the project of mass extermination *with a good conscience* and for the churches to remain silent and, in some cases, even to aid the perpetrators to escape after the war.¹⁴

Nevertheless, for Fackenheim the rupture was real, and he then asked how the mending and healing process could begin, using a term taken from Jewish mysticism, *tikkun*, to mend or restore, to denote the process. In *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim stated the nature of his quest: "But if the Holocaust is a unique and radical 'countertestimony' to Judaism and Christianity . . . how can there be a 'commandment' to resist its destructive implications, to say nothing of the will and the power to obey it?"¹⁵

According to Fackenheim, in no case could the mending take place solely in the "sphere of thought." The rupture had taken place in the sphere of life, and it is in that sphere that *Tikkun* must also take place. Fackenheim did not regard thought and life as opposing categories. He

did, however, regard life as the prior category in the present crisis. The creation of the State of Israel "on the heels of the Holocaust" was the most authentic Jewish response to the National Socialist "logic of destruction," which had come to full expression in the Holocaust. That "logic of destruction" was totally different from all previous attempts of one people to exterminate another. Following Hitler's lead, the National Socialists regarded the Jews as vermin and bacilli rather than human beings and were determined to murder them, wherever in the world they were to be found. They were not, however, content with murder. They created a "logic of destruction" in which technical intelligence, planning, and rationally were employed in the death camp universe to bring about, first, the most extreme form of Jewish self-loathing and, then, mass Jewish self-destruction.

As we have noted, Terence Des Pres has identified this process as "excremental assault."¹⁶ Des Pres and others have pointed out that the whole system had the deliberate purpose of filling prisoners with such deep self-contempt that they no longer had any wish to survive. Many of the victims were transformed into a new kind of being, the *Muselmänner*. Fackenheim cites Primo Levi's terrible description of the process of turning human beings into *Muselmänner*:

On their entry into the camp, through basic incapacity, or by misfortune, or through some banal incident, they are overcome before they can adapt themselves; they are beaten by time, they do not begin to learn German, to disentangle the infernal knot of laws and prohibitions until their body is ready to decay, and nothing can save them from selection or from death by exhaustion. Their life is short, but their number is endless; they, the *Muselmänner*, the drowned, form the backbone of the camp, an enormous mass, continuously renewed and always identical, of non-men who march and labour in silence, the divine spark dead within them, already too empty really to suffer. One hesitates to call them the living, one hesitates to call their death death.¹⁷

According to Fackenheim, the most original and characteristic product of the Third Reich was the *Muselmänner*, the person who is dead while alive and whose death is no longer a human death. The "destructive logic" of the system operated inexorably to mass produce those whom the Germans worked to death, transforming them into *Muselmänner* before they expired. Moreover, the power equation was such that no victim stood any chance of successfully resisting the National Socialist machine, which aimed to rule the world and did in fact rule Europe during the war. Amazingly, there was resistance and in that resistance Fackenheim finds both the Jewish religious response to Auschwitz and the beginning

of the Jewish *Tikkun*. The first response occurred when some camp inmates resisted the "logic of destruction" and prevented themselves from becoming *Muselmänner*. Resistance also took the form of pregnant mothers in the camps refusing to abort their pregnancies, hoping against hope that their children would survive and frustrate the National Socialist plan to eradicate every last Jew. It took other forms as well: Jewish partisans took to the woods to fight the Nazis in spite of the fact that Polish partisans were often as determined to destroy them as were the Germans; Hasidic Jews prayed when forbidden to pray; young Jews who could have fled to the woods elected instead to remain in the ghettos with their families in the hope of giving them some protection.

Fackenheim acknowledges that, when measured against the success of the destruction process, the number who resisted was small. That, however, was not the fundamental issue. What was decisive was that some did resist against hopeless odds. By their acts they demonstrated that the "logic of destruction" could be overcome.

Fackenheim insists that it is not enough to grasp the Holocaust universe conceptually. As a trained philosopher, he understands that when thought completes the work of philosophic comprehension, the thinker is left with a peculiar sense of tranquillity not unlike that felt by an audience after witnessing a Greek tragedy. For example, after contemplating the whole course of human history, with its record of crime, slaughter, and horror, Hegel was able to write in utter calm and philosophical detachment: "The wounds of the spirit heal and leave no scars behind."¹⁸

Contemplation of the Holocaust leaves us with no comparable tranquillity. The Holocaust cannot be transcended in thought. A universe that systematically aims to create *Muselmänner* is radically different from that of the tragic hero. Fackenheim therefore insists that it is not enough to understand the Holocaust intellectually, theologically, philosophically, or historically. Instead, the Holocaust universe must be resisted in "flesh-and-blood action and life." Moreover, once an enterprise like the Holocaust has proven its success, everything that follows is changed. State power becomes infinitely more threatening. Anti-Semitism takes on a permanently genocidal character. Civilization itself now includes death camps and *Muselmänner* among its material and spiritual products.

Those who understand something of what took place in the Holocaust can no longer view European civilization without seeing rationally organized, systematized "excremental assault" as one of its components.¹⁹ It is, for example, difficult for a knowledgeable visitor to look at the handsome uniform of a Paris policeman without recalling that it was men wearing the same uniform, not the SS, who rounded up Paris's Jews

for the cattle car trip to Auschwitz, which started on the French National Railroads. Nor can one forget that scientific papers on sadistically abusive experiments on death camp victims were read without protest at meetings of German medical societies during the war. The Holocaust has revealed new dimensions in the practice of medicine. As a result, resistance to the Holocaust universe and *Tikkun* become never-ending imperatives. It is in that sense that Fackenheim can still speak of a commanding Voice at Auschwitz.

Fackenheim stresses that it is only as a consequence of the *deed* of resistance that *resisting thought* can come to have any meaning. Such practical resistance is an "ontological category." The Holocaust, he argues, was both an ordered and a disordering universe designed to leave its victims with no possibility of reorientation so that they might escape the fate of becoming *Muselmänner* and passing from the world of the living dead to death itself. The first act of resistance was the simple decision, against all odds, to survive and, if the worst came, die the death of a human being. The second was to grasp the nature of the "logic of destruction." This is a difficult enterprise because there is always the danger, as we have seen with Hegel, that what is understood will be accepted, at least in thought. Fackenheim therefore insists that such thought must be accompanied by active resistance.

Thought and action were intertwined in those victims who found the courage to resist. Referring to these victims, Fackenheim has observed, "Their recognition of the Nazi logic of destruction helped produce resistance to it—a life-and-death struggle that went on day and night."²⁰ Furthermore, more was involved than mere self-protection. As the Holocaust was a *novum* in human history, this resistance was also a *novum*. It was both a way of being and a way of thought. During the Holocaust, Fackenheim asserts, authentic thought was not to be found in the greatest of philosophers such as Heidegger, who neither understood Nazism nor were troubled by the death camps, or within the circles of Europe's religious leaders. Authentic thought existed only among the resisting victims.

One of those resisting victims was a Polish Catholic noblewoman, Pelagia Lewinska, who was an Auschwitz inmate. Fackenheim cites her memoir, in which she told of her resistance:

At the outset the living places, the ditches, the mud, the piles of excrement behind the blocks, had appalled me with their horrible filth. . . . And then I saw the light! I saw that it was not a question of disorder or lack of organization but that, on the contrary, a very thoroughly conscious idea was in the back of the camp's existence. They had con-

demned us to die in our own filth, to drown in mud, in our own excrement. They wished to abase us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface every vestige of humanity, to return us to the level of wild animals, to fill us with contempt toward ourselves and our fellows. But from the instant I grasped the motivating principle . . . it was as if I had awakened from a dream. I felt under orders to live. . . . And if I died at Auschwitz it would be as a human being. I was not going to become the contemptible, disgusting brute my enemy wished me to be.²¹

Lewinska's testimony is of great importance to Fackenheim. She felt under orders to resist and to survive. Fackenheim interprets her experience as evidence of the ontological dimension of resistance and of the "commanding Voice." He acknowledges that Lewinska does not tell us who gave her the orders. He does, however, tell of other victims, religious Jews, who felt they were under the same orders and had no doubt that the orders came from God.

According to Fackenheim, Lewinska's testimony represents a new kind of sanctification. In previous eras, the ultimate testimony of Jewish fidelity was *kiddush ha-shem*, the sanctification of God's Holy Name. Such fidelity was expressed when a Jew voluntarily accepted martyrdom rather than betray his or her religion. According to Fackenheim, such martyrdom no longer made sense in or after the Holocaust. There was no sanctification in the pathetic death of *Muselmänner*. Moreover, to die under any circumstance was to give the German death machine what it sought of all Jews. Thus, resistance embodied a new kind of sanctification, *kiddush ha-tziyyun*, the sanctification of life. Any refusal to die and thus to outlive the infernal process became holy, not only for individual survivors but for the religious tradition National Socialism sought to destroy.

We can now understand Fackenheim's answer to the question, "Who heard the commanding Voice at Auschwitz?" It is: All who felt "under orders" to survive, resist, and overcome the "logic of destruction." Nevertheless, in *To Mend the World*, he does not seek to defend the traditional Judaism of covenant and election, reward and punishment. He is no longer interested in reducing the dissonance between the "countertestimony" of the Holocaust and the teachings of Judaism, as was, for example, Ignaz Maybaum. On the contrary, he emphasizes the rupture between the pre-Holocaust and the post-Holocaust worlds. He insists that the Holocaust is not a "relapse into barbarism" but a "total rupture." Citing Elie Wiesel, Fackenheim frankly acknowledges that in the aftermath of the Holocaust "our estrangement from God has become so 'cruel' that even if He were to speak to us, we have no way of understanding how to 'recognize' Him."²²

Among the examples of the rupture cited by Fackenheim are the indifference of Martin Heidegger to the Holocaust and the failure of Pope Pius XII to condemn the destruction process. According to Fackenheim, even after abandoning his earlier enthusiasm for National Socialism, the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger, was unable to be seriously concerned with the fact that his nation had introduced such prototypically modern phenomena as the death camps and the *Muselmann* into the heart of Europe. Similarly, although the Vatican was undoubtedly one of the world's best informed institutions during World War II, the pope was unable to utter a single word *explicitly* condemning the Final Solution or warning Catholics of the danger to their souls of participation in it.

Nevertheless, Fackenheim argues that the rupture cannot, must not, be the last word. What has been broken must be mended by acts of *Tikkun*. In the past Jewish mysticism audaciously described the disasters experienced by the Jewish people as catastrophes within the very substance of Divinity. Thus, when the Jewish people were driven into exile in consequence of the Judeo-Roman Wars of ancient times, the kabbalistic tradition described God's Holy Presence, *Shekhinah*, as also going into exile. The seventeenth-century mystic, R. Isaac Luria, described the creation of the universe as a consequence of a cosmic rupture in the Divine Ground, which he called the "breaking of the vessels." This was a kabbalistic metaphor for the Jewish experience of being out of place and homeless at a particularly dark hour in Israel's history.

The mystics sought to mend both the earthly rupture, which had rendered the Jew homeless, and the heavenly rupture, which, so to speak, had made God a stranger to himself, by special prayers and rituals. They regarded these as mystical acts of *Tikkun*. Today, Fackenheim argues, new acts of *Tikkun* are required to mend the ruptured world. Such acts may prove impossible. Under the best of circumstances, they are likely to be only fragmentary. Still, we have reason to hope in their partial success because contemporary acts of *Tikkun* were already accomplished during the Holocaust years. Fackenheim cites the example of Dr. Kurt Huber, the Munich professor of philosophy, who publicly protested the acts of the National Socialist regime and, as a result, was sentenced to death on April 19, 1943, by the court of Roland Freisler, Germany's most notorious Nazi judge. Huber could easily have enjoyed the relatively comfortable life of a philosophy professor. All he had to do was to keep his opinions to himself. Instead, invoking the ideals of Kant and Fichte, he willingly took upon himself the role of philosophic martyr. Huber refused to restrict his opposition to the realm of thought. He chose to unite

thought and action. While Martin Heidegger was Germany's greatest "thinker," Huber took the path of Socrates and became a martyr.

Fackenheim cites another act of *Tikkun*, that of Canon Bernard Lichtenberg of Berlin's St. Hedwig's Cathedral. On November 10, 1938, the day of *Kristallnacht*, Canon Lichtenberg beheld the monumental pogrom initiated by the Nazis and went to his church and prayed publicly for the Jews and concentration camp prisoners. He continued to do so daily until he was arrested on October 21, 1941. When brought to trial, he testified that he was scandalized by the vandalism in an ordered state and felt that the only thing he could do to help was to pray for the Jews. He said that, if freed, he would continue to do so. While in prison, he resolved to join Berlin's Jews, who had been shipped to the Polish city of Lodz, upon release. He never got the chance. He died on the way to Dachau.

Fackenheim compares the public prayer and martyrdom of Canon Lichtenberg with the silence of Pope Pius XII. He sees Lichtenberg's martyrdom as an act of *Tikkun*. As with Huber, all that Lichtenberg required for safety was silence. In both instances the "logic of destruction" was resisted not by theory but by utterly selfless action.

As noted, the first Jewish acts of *Tikkun* were the astonishing acts of resistance to total excremental assault during the Holocaust. The most profound response to the Holocaust was the collective decision of the survivors to make their way from the graveyard of Europe to the one place where Jews could be at home. He sees the establishment of the state of Israel as the fundamental Jewish act of *Tikkun*. It is, he admits, an incomplete and endangered *Tikkun*. Nevertheless, it constitutes a profound attempt to overcome the Holocaust, not in theory or by a return to the grudging sufferance of the Christian world, but by the creation of conditions in which, for the first time in two thousand years, Jews have assumed responsibility for their own future, both biologically and spiritually. Moreover, Fackenheim argues, the emergence of the State of Israel is the indispensable precondition of a "post-Holocaust *Tikkun* of Jewish-Gentile relations."²³

During the Holocaust Jewish powerlessness was such that the survival of the Jews was wholly dependent upon non-Jews. According to Fackenheim, "After the Holocaust, Jewish people owe the whole world the duty of not encouraging its vices—in the case of the wicked, murderous instincts, in the case of the good people, indifference mixed with hypocrisy—by continuing to tolerate powerlessness."²⁴

Implicit in Fackenheim's conception of the post-Holocaust Jewish *Tikkun* is a rejection of the Judaism of the Diaspora, if for no other reason than the fact that in the Diaspora Jews remain dependent upon others

for their survival. Only in Israel are they in control of a state possessed of the weapons with which they can defend themselves. Mindful of the total character of the rupture created by the Holocaust, Fackenheim declares that, although Jews continue to live in the *Gallut*, the Diaspora, *Gallut* Judaism was probably destroyed by the Holocaust, an opinion that I share to a certain extent. I also partly concur in Fackenheim's view that, if the broken threads of Judaism are to be mended, the mending is likely to take place in Israel. Moreover, this *Tikkun* will involve both religious and secular Jews, who are bound together by a common inheritance that includes not only the Holocaust but the Bible. Neither the secular nor the religious Jew would have found a home in Israel were it not for the Bible. The Holocaust may have driven them to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Only the Bible has the power to keep them there. Thus, in Israel and probably in Israel alone is there hope for the beginnings of a Jewish *Tikkun*.

It is noteworthy that the subtitle of *To Mend the World* is *Foundations of Future Jewish Thought*. Fackenheim does not offer a complete theological response to the Holocaust or a new dogmatic foundation for post-Holocaust Judaism. He merely points the way and suggests the dimensions of the task. Fackenheim's religious journey has thus taken him from his personal encounter with the National Socialist "logic of destruction" in the land of his birth, including his own incarceration in Sachsenhausen, to a period in which he reacted to the total rupture of his world by attempting to find security in a posture of dogmatic and fideistic neo-Orthodoxy, and now to a position of openness, tentativeness, and awareness of how profound the rupture has been and how fragile and beset are our post-Holocaust resources for *Tikkun*.

There was a time when my own theological position was profoundly at odds with Fackenheim's, especially with regard to his conceptions of the Divine Presence, the commanding Voice at Auschwitz, and the "614th commandment." As the dogmatic elements in his thinking have been modified, I have come to recognize him as a contemporary in the deepest sense, that is, a thinker who has shared the same time and the same spiritual agonies. When I write of the world of the "death of God" after Auschwitz, I believe I am pointing to the same reality characterized by Fackenheim as the total rupture created by the Holocaust.

A final word is in order concerning the richness of Fackenheim's thought, which encompasses, among other disciplines, an authoritative knowledge of Western philosophy, especially German philosophy in the modern period, Jewish religious thought and philosophy, and modern European history. His knowledge has enabled him to examine with great

lucidity the profound character of the modern crisis. Above all, it has enabled him to move reflection concerning the Holocaust and its aftermath beyond the parochial and to demonstrate its universal significance.

Arthur A. Cohen

The late Arthur A. Cohen is another Jewish thinker who has reflected on the silence of God during and after Auschwitz. Cohen was one of the first Jewish thinkers of the post-World War II generation to publish a major theological work, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew*.²⁵ Like Fackenheim, Cohen was initially silent on the problem of God and the Holocaust. He did not address that problem in a book-length publication until the 1981 appearance of *The Tremendum*, in which he explained his silence. He wrote that, like many of his peers, he "had no language with which to speak of evil (other than by exhibition and denunciation)." This left him deeply moved by the Holocaust but unable to speak of it. Cohen admitted he "had constructed a modern theology without dealing with evil, either in itself or in its horrific manifestation as *Tremendum*."²⁶

In the first edition of *After Auschwitz*, I criticized Cohen for writing a Jewish theology without confronting the question of God and the death camps.²⁷ Nevertheless, I recognized that in the aftermath of a trauma as radical as the Holocaust, it was not surprising that Jewish thinkers waited a whole generation before turning to the question. The shock was simply too great.

In *The Tremendum* Cohen took the unusual step of acknowledging the criticism expressed in *After Auschwitz*: "Richard Rubenstein was right. I had ignored Auschwitz, imagining that somehow I had escaped. But he was not right in that imputation. I did not imagine that I had escaped (or that any Jew of the non-European diaspora had escaped). But I was struck dumb and turned aside . . . and that amounts to the same thing: avoidance. The *tremendum* cannot be avoided."²⁸

In writing about the Holocaust Cohen created a neologism, the *tremendum*, to denote the event. He has written that he was mindful of Rudolf Otto's characterization of God's holiness as *mysterium tremendum* when he chose his term. According to Cohen, both *mysterium tremendum* and *tremendum* convey "the aspect of vastness" and "the resonance of terror."²⁹ Nevertheless, the two terms refer to utterly disparate realities. In contrast to God's awesome holiness, Cohen saw the Holocaust as "the human *tremendum*, the enormity of an infinitized man, who no longer seems to fear death or, perhaps more to the point, fears it so completely, denies death so mightily, that the only patent of his refutation and denial

is to build a mountain of corpses to the divinity of the dead, to placate death by the magic of endless murder."³⁰

Cohen offered a further explanation of his use of *tremendum* in connection with the Holocaust: "I call the death camp the *tremendum*, for it is the monument of meaningless inversion of life to an orgiastic celebration of death, to a psychosexual and pathological degeneracy unparalleled and unfathomable to any bonded to life."³¹

An important reason for Cohen's use of *tremendum* is that, like Otto's *mysterium tremendum*, it conveys the sense of unfathomable mystery. Cohen wrote of the "palpable irrationality" of the Holocaust, an event he regarded as surpassing all others in its extremity and its uniqueness. Cohen ruled out the possibility that the intellectual tools used by historians and political and social scientists to comprehend war, religious and social conflict, and mass slaughter are appropriate to an understanding of the Holocaust. This is a position with which I disagree most emphatically.³² The uniqueness of the Holocaust does not make it opaque to historical and scientific research.

Like Fackenheim, Cohen eventually came to see that the Holocaust had rendered problematic faith in the biblical God of covenant and election. Nevertheless, Cohen was more explicit in addressing the difficulties the Holocaust poses for *philosophical Heism* than for the normative biblical-rabbinic view of God's relation to Israel. (Let us recall that the philosophical problem is the perennial question of the contradiction between an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God and the existence of even a single case of innocent suffering.) Cohen argued that a constructive theology after the Holocaust must have at least three characteristics:

1. God must abide in a universe in which neither evil nor God's presence is accounted unreal.
2. The relation of God to all of creation, including demonic elements and events, must be seen as meaningful and valuable.
3. The reality of God can no longer be isolated from God's real involvement in the life of creation.

Cohen asserted that, if any of the three characteristics is without foundation, God ceases to be anything other than a "metaphor for the inexplicable."

Like most of the other Holocaust theologians, Cohen leaned heavily on the kabbalistic theology of Isaac Luria (1534–72), as mediated by the scholarship of Gershom Scholem. In attempting to satisfy these criteria, Cohen also acknowledged his indebtedness to an existentialist tradition appropriated for Jewish thought by the German-Jewish thinker Franz Ro-

senzweig (1886–1929). This tradition was spelled out most completely by Hegel's contemporary, the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775–1854). Schelling in turn was strongly indebted to the medieval Rhineland mystic Jakob Boehme (1575–1624) and to the first words of the Fourth Gospel, "In the beginning was the Word."

The idea of human freedom is crucial to Cohen's Holocaust theology. Relying heavily on the aforementioned sources, Cohen held that in the beginning the divine *Urgrund* (Primal Ground of all reality) overflowed its original and absolute self-containment in a movement of love. As long as God was all-in-all and nothing existed, so to speak, beside Him, there could be no manifestation of divine love or divine personality, both of which require a nondivine otherness, such as a created world and creatures capable of responding to God. The world is thus for Cohen, as for his theological predecessors, God's created other lovingly formed by the divine Word. However, without the presence of man, the world would be devoid of freedom and incapable of responding to God's love or to His personality. It is man who, partaking of God's speech and His freedom, is alone capable of responding to God. According to Cohen, freedom was originally intended by God to be tempered by reason, thereby preventing it from becoming willful caprice. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and man's freedom, without which he could not be human or respond to God, eventually became the willful caprice of the Holocaust.

Cohen was especially concerned with responding to those who complain of the silence of God during the Holocaust. He argued that this complaint is in reality a mistaken yearning for a nonexistent, interruptive God, who is expected magically to intervene in human affairs. According to Cohen, if there were such a God and if He were capable of interfering in history, creation would be an extension of God rather than an independent domain brought into being by God's creative love. Freedom, the essence of man, would be nonexistent, and human beings would be mere automatons. Put differently, if man is free, God cannot intervene in human affairs, no matter how depraved human beings become.

Cohen's position is summarized in the following statement:

What is taken as God's speech is really always man's hearing. . . . God is not the strategist of our particularities or of our historical condition, but rather *the mystery of our futurity*, always *our posse*, not *our acts*. If we can begin to see God less as the interloper whose insertion is welcome (when it accords with our needs) and more as the immensity whose reality is our prefiguration, . . . whose plenitude and unfolding are the *hope of our futurity*, we shall have won a sense of God whom we may love