

CHAPTER THREE

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CHAPTER THREE

THE HOLOCAUST

One cannot overstate the impact of the Holocaust on world Jewry. The impact of the annihilation of six million European Jews devastated numerous families and communities. In just six years, two-thirds of European Jewry and ninety per cent of its rabbis were annihilated by Hitler's Final Solution. The most learned and culturally-rich centres of Jewish learning were wiped out. Numerically and psychologically they are still recovering. Theologically, questions continue to be raised about the non-intervention of both God and the rest of the world in the face of such horrific suffering and death. Why the silence of God? How could an all-loving, omnipotent God not intervene to prevent it? What does that say about the nature and power of God? How can one speak of God after Auschwitz? And why did the Gentile world let it happen?

Many tentative responses have been suggested by Jewish and Christian thinkers. It has to be said, though, that the Holocaust has had less impact on the churches. If one enters a Christian bookshop one will be hard pushed to find a Christian author writing on the Holocaust; and likewise if one listens to sermons throughout the year rarely, if ever, are the issues of the shoah raised by the preacher. In contrast, if one enters a Jewish bookshop one is immediately aware that nearly two-thirds of the books are addressing issues directly related to the Holocaust. This in itself speaks of the impact on the Jewish world. The Christian world has yet to fully comprehend it. It will be no surprise that the majority of texts in this chapter are from Jewish thinkers. Although the issue of Christian silence has provoked some discussion, this chapter concentrates on the theological problem. How do we make sense of the silence of God? How do we respond to what Arthur Cohen has described as 'The Tremendum of our Age'?

H.P.F.

RENEWING THE COVENANT

In the first extract *Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth* from September 1991, highlights what will shortly become apparent in this chapter, that there is no uniform Jewish response to the Holocaust. There is a multiplicity of interpretations. For him, the Jewish people do not have a common language to reflect on its fate; nevertheless the Holocaust has revealed that they share a common destiny. In the face of their total destruction, the Jewish people have renewed their covenant commitment to survive as the people of God:

An analysis of contemporary Jewry and Judaism must begin with the Holocaust because in it, the covenantal people came face to face with the possibility of its own extinction. It took several decades before theologians felt able freely to articulate their thoughts about it. In some circles, silence is still felt to be the best, perhaps the only, response.

The Holocaust reveals to the full the problematic nature of the religious interpretation of history. It has not yielded a single meaning but a vast multiplicity, of which only a narrow range has been touched on here. In the absence of prophecy there are no such things as events which carry with them their own interpretation. And yet Judaism must continue to wrestle with the problem. For one of its primary expressions is narrative: telling the story of the covenantal people through time. Judaism is not simply a faith. It is a faith embodied in a particular people, the way of life it lives and the path it takes through the complex map of history.

Reflection on the *Shoah* reveals two significant facts about contemporary Jewish existence. The first is the absence of a shared set of Jewish meanings which alone might have allowed the Holocaust to be incorporated into Jewish memory. For the religious believer, the Holocaust confirms his faith; for the unbeliever it confirms his lack of faith. For the radical it creates a *novum* in history; for the traditionalist it recalls earlier catastrophes. For the pietist it testifies to God's suffering presence in the world; for the secularist it proves His absence. These variant readings have shown no tendency to converge over time.

The fundamental divide is between those who see the Holocaust as an unprecedented event which shatters our previous understanding of

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the covenant, and those who insist that the covenant survives intact even in the valley of the shadow of death. Those who take the first view see *Yom ha-Shoah*, Holocaust Memorial Day, as a seminal addition to the Jewish calendar, a turning-point in history. Those who take the second see the Holocaust as a new dimension in an ancient grief, such as that expressed on the ninth of Av, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temples.

It is important to understand that the ambiguity of the Holocaust is not a feature of the event itself. It is a feature of the pre-understandings that different thinkers bring to it. For many centuries, from the destruction of the second Temple to the threshold of European emancipation, Jews shared a broad framework of belief that allowed them to understand their present situation, why it had come about and to what it eventually would lead. They were in exile because of their sins, and one day they would return to their land. That shared framework, which experienced stresses from the Spanish expulsion onwards, finally collapsed in the nineteenth century. Those who held to traditional beliefs were now not Jews *tout court*, but a subsection of the community known to their critics as 'Orthodox' Jews. The multiplicity of responses to the Holocaust testifies to the still fragmented nature of Jewish consciousness, which lacks a common language through which a people might reflect on its fate. This preceded the Holocaust itself and has persisted since.

But the second fact is in sharp contradistinction to the first. For the *Shoah* confronted Jews with an inescapable reminder that though they might not share a common language, they shared a common fate. The Final Solution made no distinctions between Jews. The assimilated half-or quarter-Jew from Vienna or Berlin was cast into the same camp with the pious talmudist from Vilna and the bearded mystic from Berdichev. Jews had different self-definitions. But they were subject to the same other-definition. They might not see themselves, but they were seen by others, as members of the same people.

That fact has significantly shaped post-Holocaust Jewish awareness. The sense of being a people apart and alone, held together in a collective destiny and exercising collective responsibility, has grown. Its focus is the land and state of Israel, symbol and reality of the Jewish determination never again to be homeless, powerless victims. Israel, the land and state, has brought in its wake intractable problems, political, military and ethical, and over these, too, Jews have been divided. But this does not detract from its centrality in Jewish life world-wide. Nor is

this a political proposition only. It is in its own right a theological proposition, albeit a controversial one. For the Bible and all subsequent Jewish thought has seen in the return of the Jews to their land a new chapter—perhaps the ultimate one—in the covenantal story.

Jewish responses to the Holocaust, then, reveal not only the divisions that still exist in Jewish thought but also a new impetus towards unity: towards a clear and collective sense of peoplehood. For what is striking is that Jews of all kinds, religious and secular, have responded to their threatened destruction with a fierce determination to survive. 'I will not die, but I will live', says the Psalm, and that has been the Jewish response to the journey through the valley of the shadow of death. There may be no common understanding of the Jewish destiny, but there is a common conviction that it must be continued. Faced with its eclipse, the Jewish people has reaffirmed its covenant with history. The story of contemporary Jewry begins with what in retrospect is a not unremarkable fact: that the people of Israel lives and bears witness to the living God.

Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant*, Manchester University Press, 1992, pp. 48–51]

THE 614TH COMMANDMENT

Emil Fackenheim, Jewish theologian and a Holocaust survivor now living in Israel, shares with Sacks the importance of surviving as the people of God. His famous phrase resounds throughout Jewry: the Jewish people must not grant Hitler a posthumous victory. Traditionally there were 613 commandments in Judaism; now there are 614 commandments: the 614th is the imperative to survive. Belief in the God of Israel must continue however hard that belief may be. One must not despair—for despair would grant Hitler a posthumous victory.

Can we confront the Holocaust, and yet not despair? Not accidentally has it taken twenty years for us to face this question, and it is not certain that we can face it yet. The contradiction is too staggering, and every authentic escape is barred. For we are forbidden to turn present and future life into death, as the price of remembering death at Auschwitz. And we are equally forbidden to affirm present and future life, at the price of forgetting Auschwitz.

We have lived in this contradiction for twenty years without being able to face it. Unless I am mistaken, we are now beginning to face it,

however fragmentarily and inconclusively. And from this beginning confrontation there emerges what I will boldly term a 614th commandment: *the authentic Jew of today is forbidden to hand Hitler yet another posthumous victory*. (This formulation is terribly inadequate, yet I am forced to use it until one more adequate is found. First, although no anti-Orthodox implication is intended, as though the 613 commandments stood necessarily in need of change, we must face the fact that something radically new has happened. Second, although the commandment should be positive rather than negative, we must face the fact that Hitler did win at least one victory—the murder of six million Jews. Third, although the very name of Hitler should be erased rather than remembered, we cannot disguise the uniqueness of his evil under a comfortable generality, such as persecution-in-general, tyranny-in-general, or even the demonic in general.)

I think the authentic Jew of today is beginning to hear the 614th commandment. And he hears it whether, as agnostic, he hears no more, or whether as believer, he hears the voice of the *metzaveh* (the commander) in the *mitzvah* (the commandment). Moreover, it may well be the case that the authentic Jewish agnostic and the authentic Jewish believer are closer today than at any previous time.

To be sure, the agnostic hears no more the *mitzvah*. Yet if he is Jewishly authentic, he cannot but face the fragmentariness of his hearing. He cannot, like agnostics and atheists all around him, regard this *mitzvah* as the product of self-sufficient human reason, realizing itself in an ever-advancing history of autonomous human enlightenment. The 614th commandment must be, to him, an abrupt and absolute given, revealed in the midst of total catastrophe.

On the other hand, the believer, who hears the voice of the *metzaveh* in the *mitzvah*, can hardly hear anything more than the *mitzvah*. The reasons that made Martin Buber speak of an eclipse of God are still compelling. And if, nevertheless, a bond between Israel and the God of Israel can be experienced in the abyss, this can hardly be more than the *mitzvah* itself.

The implications of even so slender a bond are momentous. If the 614th commandment is binding upon the authentic Jew, then we are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very 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 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 another posthumous victory.

How can we possibly obey these imperatives? To do so requires the endurance of intolerable contradictions. Such endurance cannot but bespeak an as yet unutterable faith. If we are capable of this endurance, then the faith implicit in it may well be of historic consequence. At least twice before—at the time of the destruction of the First and of the Second Temples—Jewish endurance in the midst of catastrophe helped transform the world. We cannot know the future, if only because the present is without precedent. But this ignorance on our part can have no effect on our present action. The uncertainty of what will be may not shake our certainty of what we must do.

[Emil Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History*, Schocken Books, 1978, pp. 22-24]

WRESTLING WITH GOD

Many Jews find the Hebrew Bible a rich resource of material. An undoubted theme of the Bible is the suffering of the people of Israel and the biblical character Job is marvellous for grappling with the reality of innocent suffering. The main Jewish writer to use Job is Eliezer Berkovits, a leading Jewish philosopher and Talmudic scholar. The identification with Job is one way of explaining why righteous people experience inexplicable suffering. Job's response to his suffering was to wrestle with God. For Eliezer Berkovits, the Jewish people today must wrestle with God and ask deep, searching questions. There is a religious imperative to do so. However, Berkovits does recognize that there is a profound difference between Job's situation and the Shoah—God remained completely silent and inactive in the death camps:

Undoubtedly, for our generation Auschwitz represents the supreme crisis of faith. It would be tantamount to a spiritual tragedy if it were otherwise. After the Holocaust Israel's first religious responsibility is to 'reason' with God and—if need be—to wrestle with Him.

The 'reasoning' with God is a need of faith; it issues from the very heart of faith. When in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, at the hanging of the little boy, someone asks: 'Where is God now?' it is the right question to be

asked. Not to ask it would have been blasphemy. Faith cannot pass by such horror in silence. Faith, because it is trust in God, demands justice of God. It cannot countenance that God be involved in injustice and cruelty. And yet, for faith God is involved in everything under the sun. What faith is searching for is, if not to understand fully, at least to gain a hint of the nature of God's involvement. This questioning of God with the very power of faith stands out as a guidepost at the earliest beginnings of the Jewish way in history. Abraham wrestled with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. We note how the man, who in the humility of his piety sees himself as mere 'dust and ashes' yet has the audacity to challenge God with the words: 'The judge of all the earth shall not do justice?' There is no contradiction here. The man of faith questions God because of his faith. It is the faith of Abraham in God that cannot tolerate injustice on the part of God. This is also the essence of Job's dilemma. The sustained fire of his plaint is not derived from his personal plight, but from the passion of his faith. There is no weakening of faith here. On the contrary. It is the very power of the faith that lends force to the accusation. What has happened to Job is wrong; it is terribly wrong because it is judged by the ideal of justice that Job formed for himself on the strength of his faith in God. That Job did not accept the arguments of his friends in defense of divine providence is not a matter of stubborn self-righteousness, nor is it due to a sense of exaggerated self-importance. What the friends attempt to do is to defend a wrong as justice. By doing so, they—without being aware of it—degrade Job's idea of God. Because of his faith Job cannot accept a defense of God that implies an insult to the dignity of the God in whom he believes.

The questioning of God's providence in the death camps was taking place within the classical tradition of Judaism. Unfortunately, unlike the case of Job, God remained silent to the very end of the tragedy and the millions in the concentration camps were left alone to shift for themselves in the midst of infinite despair. To this day, theologians are arguing about the meaning of God's answer to Job. Be that as it may, one thing is certain: in the denouement God appears to Job; He makes himself known to him. Thus Job is able to find peace with God in the words: 'I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; / But now mine eyes see Thee; / Wherefore I abhor my words, and repent, / Seeing I am dust and ashes.' No such denouement to the drama of faith took place in the camps. To the very end God remained silent and hiding. Millions were looking for him—in vain. They had heard of Him by

the hearing of the ear, but what was granted to their eyes to behold was 'dust and ashes,' into which they—and everything dear to them—were turned. There were really two Jobs at Auschwitz: the one who belatedly accepted the advice of Job's wife and turned his back on God, and the other who kept his faith to the end, who affirmed it at the very doors of the gas chambers, who was able to walk to his death defiantly singing his '*Ani Mamin—I Believe*'. If there were those whose faith was broken in the death camp, there were others who never wavered. If God was not present for many, He was not lost to many more. Those who rejected did so in authentic rebellion; those who affirmed and testified to the very end did so in authentic faith. Neither the authenticity of rebellion nor the authenticity of faith is available to those who are only Job's brother. The outsider, the brother of the martyrs, enters on a confusing heritage. He inherits both the rebellion and the witness of the martyrs: a rebellion not silenced by the witness, a witness not made void by the rebellion. In our generation, Job's brother, if he wishes to be true to his God-given heritage, "reasons" with God in believing rebellion and rebellious belief. What is it then he may hope for? He is not searching for an understanding, in terms of his faith, of what had befallen his people. He is not attempting to steal a glance at "the hand" of the Almighty in order to be able to appreciate what meaning the senseless destruction of European Israel might have in the divine scheme. To understand is to justify, to accept. That he will not do. He looks to his religious bearings. He desires to affirm, but not by behaving as if the Holocaust had never happened. He knows that this generation must live and believe in the shadow of the Holocaust. He must learn how this is to be done. If his faith is to remain meaningful, he must make room for the impenetrable darkness of the death camps within his faith. The darkness will remain, but in its "light" will he make his affirmations of faith, and it will accent his affirmations. The inexplicable will not be explained, yet it will become a positive influence in the formulation of that which is to be acknowledged. The sorrow will stay, but it will be blessed with the promise of another day for Israel to continue on its eternal course with a new dignity and a new self-assurance. Thus, perhaps in the awful misery of man will be revealed to us the awesome mystery of God. But when this happens, who can say that it will not be we who, seeking His consolation, in consoling Him shall find our comfort?

[Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust*, Krav, 1973, pp. 68-70]

THE AFTER-LIFE

In all of these attempts to wrestle with the significance of the Holocaust no mention has been made of the Hereafter. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, lecturer at the University of Canterbury in England and visiting Professor at Middlesex University, seeks to bring this dimension of Jewish thinking back into focus. The horrific suffering and deaths in the Shoah necessitates for him the belief in an after-life. The righteous servants of God who suffer for the sanctification of the Divine Name will be vindicated in the Hereafter. There is therefore for Cohn-Sherbok, no necessity to give up belief in God, rather the focus should shift to the traditional affirmation of a life beyond death for righteous sufferers:

One element is missing from all these justifications of Jewish suffering; there is no appeal to the Hereafter. Though the Bible only contains faint references to the realm of the dead, the doctrine of Life after Death came into prominence during the Maccabean period (2nd century BCE) when righteous individuals were dying for their faith. Subsequently the belief in the World to Come was regarded as one of the central tenets of the Jewish faith. According to rabbinic scholars, it was inconceivable that life would end at death: God's justice demanded that the righteous of Israel enter into a realm of eternal bliss where they would be compensated for their earthly travail. Because of this belief generations of Jews have been able to reconcile their belief in a benevolent and merciful God with the terrible tragedies they have endured. Through the centuries the conviction that the righteous would inherit eternal life has sustained generations of Jewish martyrs who suffered persecution and death. As Jews were slaughtered, they glorified God through dedication to the Jewish faith—such an act is referred to as *Kiddush ha-Shem* (Sanctification of the Divine Name). These heroic Jews who remained steadfast in their faith did not question the ways of God; rather their deaths testify to their firm belief in a providential Lord of history who would reserve a place for them in the Hereafter.

In Judaism this act of sanctification was a task for all Jews if tragic circumstances arose. Thus through centuries of oppression *Kiddush ha-Shem* gave meaning to the struggle of Jewish warriors, strength of endurance under cruel torture, and a way out of slavery and conversion, through suicide. In the Middle Ages repeated outbreaks of Christian persecution strengthened the Jewish determination to profess their faith.

Kiddush ha-Shem became a common way of confronting missionary coercion—if Jews were not permitted to live openly as Jews, they were determined not to live at all. When confronted by force, Jews attempted to defend themselves, but chose death if this proved impossible. Thousands of Jews in the Middle Ages lost their lives. Some fell in battle, but the majority committed suicide for their faith. In the chronicles of this slaughter *Kiddush ha-Shem* was the dominant motif. Jews endeavoured to fight their assailants, but when efforts failed they died as martyrs.

During the Medieval period Jews also suffered because of the accusation that they performed ritual murders of Christian children, defamed Christianity in the Talmud, desecrated the Host, and brought about the Black Death. As they endured trials and massacres, they were fortified by the belief that God would redeem them in the future life. Repeatedly they proclaimed their faith in God and witnessed to the tradition of their ancestors. In later centuries *Kiddush ha-Shem* also became part of the history of Spanish Jewry. Under the fire and torture of the Inquisition chambers and tribunals Jews remained committed to their faith. The principles of *Kiddush ha-Shem* supported multitudes of Jews as they faced calamity and death. The reality of their sacrifice and the image of their martyrdom became a dominant element in the Jewish consciousness. Due to the belief in divine reward, the Jewish community escaped disillusionment and despair in the face of tragedy: the courage of those who gave their lives to sanctify God's name became an inspiration to all those who faced similar circumstances. The history of the Jewish people thus bears eloquent testimony to the heroic martyrs who were convinced that reward in Heaven would be vouchsafed to them if they remained faithful to God in their life on earth.

In the concentration camps as well a number of religious Jews remained loyal to the tradition of *Kiddush ha-Shem*, joining the ranks of generations of martyrs, they sanctified God with unshakable faith. As they waited the final sentence, they drew strength from one another to witness to the God of Israel. In the camps many Jews faced death silently. When their last moments arrived they died without fear. They neither grovelled nor pleaded for mercy since they believed it was God's judgement to take their lives. With love and trust they awaited the death sentence. As they prepared to surrender themselves to God, they thought only of the purity of their souls. The martyrs of the concentration camps were convinced that their deaths would

serve as a prelude to redemption. In Heaven they would receive their just reward.

[Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Issues in Contemporary Judaism*, Macmillan, 1991, pp. 15-17]

THE DEATH OF GOD

A different response from those above can be found in the work of Richard Rubenstein—Holocaust survivor and the Robert Lawton Distinguished Professor of Religion in the United States. It took some ten years before he could even begin to reflect on his experiences in the death camps. His reflections probably constitute the most radical theological response yet to the Shoah. For him, after Auschwitz it is no longer possible to believe in God. The God of traditional Judaism has died; however, he shares with Fackenheim and Sacks the stress on Jewish survival. However, for Rubenstein, it is survival in the face of the death of God:

In the spring of 1965, I experienced something of a crisis upon reading William Hamilton's article, 'The Death of God Theologies Today', in the *Christian Scholar*. To my surprise, I learned that Hamilton regarded my writings as an example of death-of-God theology. My first reaction was one of acute embarrassment. *God simply doesn't die in Judaism*. The symbolism upon which the metaphor of the death of God rests is of obvious Christian origin. Although the divinity of the Christ is not supposed to have expired on the cross, the age-old, anti-Jewish deicide accusation bears witness to the fact that the crucifixion was often regarded as the occasion of the death of God. Of course, it has always been possible for Christians, in asserting the death of God, to look beyond death to a new epiphany of the divine. Although we live in the time of the death of God, the Christian death-of-God theologians do not rule out the possibility of a reappearance of the resurrected God.

Because of our alienation from the symbolism of the cross, it is impossible for Jews to use the words, 'God is dead'. Nevertheless, I believe we must use these words of alien origin and connotation. American Jews share the same cultural universe as contemporary Christian thinkers; we experience the radical secularity of our times as they do. We have been deeply influenced by Freud, Sartre, Hegel, Dostoevski, Melville, and Kierkegaard. Above all, we have been moved by Nietzsche.

If I were asked to cite the text *par excellence* from which I derive the verbal origins of the radical mood, I would unhesitatingly follow William Hamilton and point to the chapter in Nietzsche's *Gay Science* entitled 'The Madman'. In it the Madman proclaims his search for God, asserts that we have murdered Him, and becomes affrighted at the terrible event that has already happened but is yet too distant for us to comprehend. The Madman rhetorically asks the question, also crucial to Thomas Altizer's apocalyptic theology: 'Shall we not ourselves have to become gods merely to be worthy of it?' The Madman then enters a church, which he has declared to be a sepulchre of God and there sings his *Requiem aeternam deo*. After Nietzsche, it is impossible to avoid using his language to express the total absence of God from our experience. Martin Buber felt deeply the profanity of our times. He attempted to soften its harshness by speaking of an 'eclipse of God'. Buber's formulation would, however, seem to be a compromise. No words are entirely adequate to characterize a historical epoch. Nevertheless, I believe the most adequate theological description of our times is to be found in the assertion that *we live in the time of the death of God*. The vitality of death-of-God theology is rooted in the fact that it has faced more openly than any other contemporary theological movement the truth of the divine-human encounter in our times. In truth, the divine-human encounter is totally non-existent. Those theologies that attempt to find the reality of God's presence in the contemporary world manifest a deep insensitivity to the art, literature, and technology of our times. Whatever may be its shortcomings, death-of-God theology is very much aware of the cultural universe of which it is a significant expression. Radical theology is no fad. It will not be replaced by some other theological novelty in the foreseeable future. Too many tendencies in classical theology, philosophy, and literature have intersected in this movement for it to disappear as rapidly as it gained attention.

Nevertheless, I believe that radical theology errs in its assertion that God is dead. Such an assertion exceeds human knowledge. The statement, 'God is dead,' is only significant in what it reveals about those who make it. It imparts information concerning what the speaker believes about God; it reveals nothing about God. I should like to suggest that, since this information has strictly phenomenal import, we ought to formulate it from the viewpoint of the observer. It is more precise to assert that we live in the time of the death of God than to declare 'God is dead'. The death of God is a cultural fact. We shall never know whether it is more than that.

The ultimate relevance of theology is anthropological. Though theology purports to make statements about God, its significance rests on what it reveals about the theologians as well as the theologian's community and culture. All theologies have a subjective component. They are statements about the way the theologian experiences the world.

The theologian is really closer to the poet or the creative artist than to the physical scientist. The value of artistic creation lies in the fact that someone with a highly sensitive subjectivity is able to communicate something of a personal experience which others recognize as clarifying and enriching their own experience. Theologians, no matter how religiously committed they may seem to be, in reality communicate an inner world they believe others may share. The term "God" is very much like the unstructured inkblot used in the Rorschach test. Its very lack of concrete content invites us to express our own fears, aspirations, and yearnings concerning our origin, our destiny, and our end. From a technical point of view, theological statements would seem to be most precise when they are enunciated in a phenomenological context. There are some indications that Professors Altizer and Hamilton accept this methodological limitation on theological assertion. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether they speak of what they have experienced or whether they believe God has literally perished.

Although my first reaction to Professor Hamilton's identification of my writing as death of God theology was embarrassment, I am grateful to him for causing me to reconsider my theological moorings. I have concluded that, alien and non-Jewish as the terminology may be, Christian death-of-God theology is closer than any other movement in Christian theology to my own theological writing. We are at least agreed upon our analysis of the radical secularity of contemporary culture as a starting point for theological speculation. We concur that ours is the time of the death of God. We are, each in our own way, convinced that both the methods and the conclusions of contemporary theology will reflect the radical hiatus between our world and the traditional communities out of which we have come.

Nevertheless, in the time of the death of God the Jewish radical theologian remains profoundly Jewish, as the Christian radical remains profoundly Christian.

From the concluding section of his argument on page 306, Rubenstein suggests that even though we may live in the time of the death of God, God

is both life and death. The God of traditional Judaism has died but we need not despair:

God is not death; He, so to speak is the source of both life and death. Death is the final price we pay for life and love, but death is not all there is. Life has its deep, abiding, and profound moments of joy and fulfillment. Were there no death of the individual, there would be no biological need for love in the order of things. Moreover, every act of love truly consummated is to some degree a joyful dying to the self. It is a distortion to see God solely as love, for love and death are inseparable. God creates, so to speak, out of his own substance; He nurtures, but He also sets a term to individual existence, which in its individuality is no less indivisible an epiphenomenal manifestation of the divine substance. The creative process is a totality. It is impossible to affirm the loving and the creative aspects of God's activity without also affirming that creation and destruction are part of an indivisible process. Each wave in the ocean of God's nothingness has its moment, but it must inevitably give way to other waves. We are not, like Job, destined to receive back everything twofold.

The world of the death of the biblical God need not be a place of gloom or despair. One need not live forever for life to be worth living. Creation, however impermanent, is full of promise. Those who affirm the inseparability of the creative and the destructive in the divine activity thereby affirm their understanding of the necessity to pay in full measure with their own return to the Holy Nothingness for the gift of life.

[Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992 edition, pp. 249-251, 306]

A NEW THEOLOGY?

In response to the radicalism of Rubenstein, Norman Solomon believes that the Jewish tradition has the resources to engage with the Holocaust without dramatic changes. Solomon writes as an Orthodox Rabbi and Fellow in Modern Jewish Thought at the Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies in Oxford England. For him, the Holocaust does not demand a new theology. He blames certain unhelpful tendencies in post-Enlightenment philosophy for these demands. Solomon points out that suffering has been a constant feature of life and therefore the Holocaust itself should not challenge belief in God. It is still

possible to believe in an omnipotent, all-loving God. The focus for Judaism should continue to be faithfulness to the mitzvot, the commandments of God as revealed in Torah:

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

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

Second, the reason why non-orthodox Holocaust theologians reject 'traditional' answers may be something quite other than the intrinsic inadequacy of those answers. In section 7.2.2 it was stressed that the traditional interpretations of suffering depend heavily for such cogency as they may have on the belief in life after death and/or the transmigration of souls. Equally, they depend upon a belief in the inerrancy of scripture and in the authenticity of its rabbinic interpretation. These beliefs have been under attack in modern times for reasons which have *nothing to do with* the Shoah. Jews, like Christians, have been challenged by, for instance, modern biblical studies, which tend to undermine the traditional type of scriptural belief and demand a new kind of attitude to the authority of the Bible. Likewise, modern intellectual developments, such as the radical questioning of Cartesian dualism, have placed new strains on the concept of life after death. These changes have so weakened the traditional arguments justifying the ways of God with humankind that the Shoah has provided the *coup de grâce* to lead the modernist wing of Judaism to abandon traditional theodicy altogether.

Thus it is not that the Shoah poses a new challenge to theology, but rather that the Shoah came at a time when theology was already in a greater ferment than ever before in its history, a ferment occasioned by the intellectual movements of the modern world. This explains why earlier tragedies, such as the expulsion from Spain, occasioned not the abandonment but the development of traditional modes of response to suffering.