

From Conflict to Dialogue

Theological Approaches
after the Shoah



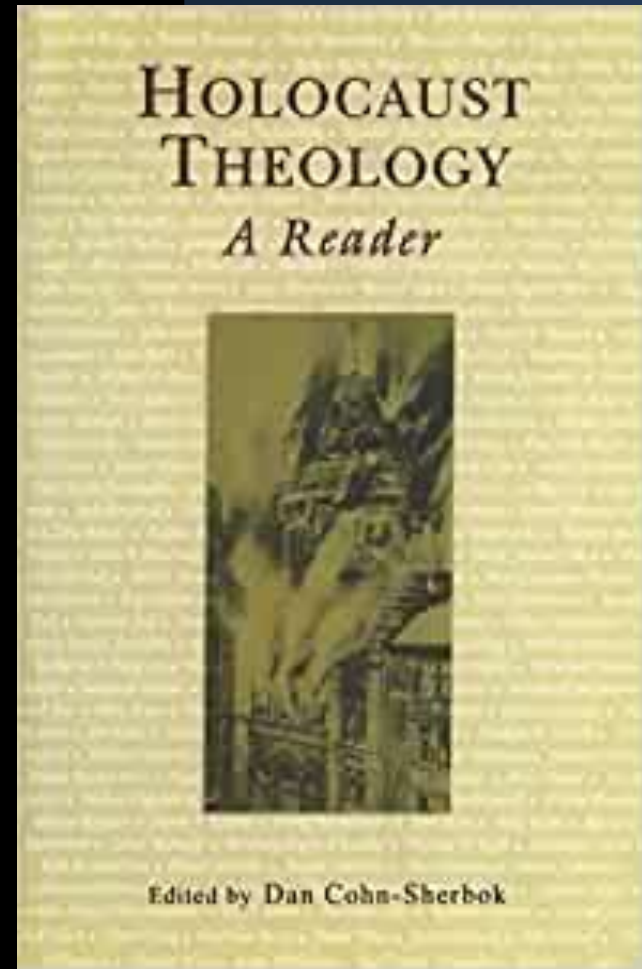
Questions Raised after the Shoah

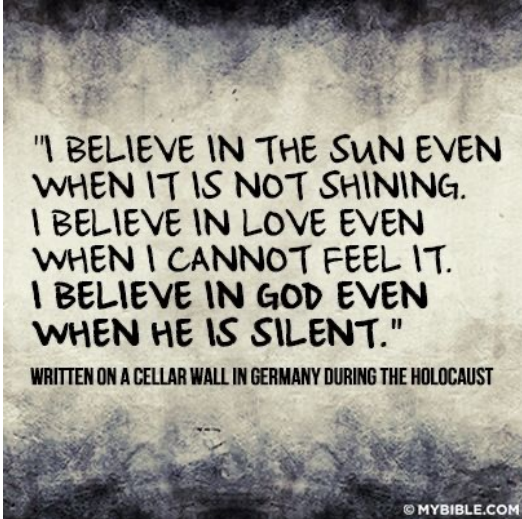
After 20 years of silence, groups and individuals began to ask the following questions:

- Why did God allow the Shoah to happen?
- In what ways did the Church contribute to anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism?
- How can Jews and Christians now build bridges?

Theological Implications – Debates on the Following Topics:

- The Nature of God
- Supersessionist theology
- The covenant
- Charges of deicide





"I BELIEVE IN THE SUN EVEN
WHEN IT IS NOT SHINING.
I BELIEVE IN LOVE EVEN
WHEN I CANNOT FEEL IT.
I BELIEVE IN GOD EVEN
WHEN HE IS SILENT."

WRITTEN ON A CELLAR WALL IN GERMANY DURING THE HOLOCAUST

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"IF THERE IS A GOD,
HE WILL HAVE TO
BEG MY
FORGIVENESS."

(A phrase carved into a concentration camp cell
by a Jewish prisoner.)

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WHERE WAS
GOD

The Nature of God: Jewish Perspectives

- What happened to the merciful and omnipotent God of Israel?
- Was it punishment for the sin of European Jews? - the view of some orthodox Jews in accordance with rabbinic traditions.
- Intra-Jewish objections to the notion of punishment:
 1. Condemnation of Jews who had already experienced the ultimate depths of suffering.
 2. God was hidden during the Shoah, but he manifests himself with the establishment of the Jewish state (Eliezer Berkovitz): 'the resurrection of the nation'.

The Nature of God: Jewish Perspectives

God was present in Auschwitz and called upon his people to survive and to withstand the Nazis (Emil Fackenheim). The following should be added to the 613 biblical commandments: it is the duty of the Jew to ensure that Hitler is not victorious.

Should not the existence of God be denied? Does not the Shoah prove that Israel is not the elect nation (Richard Rubenstein)? God is dead. Only people can create meaning and value.



The Auschwitz praxis was based on a new principle: for one portion of mankind, existence itself is a crime, punishable by humiliation, torture, and death. And the new world produced by this praxis included two kinds of inhabitants, those who were given the "punishment" and those who administered it.

— *Emil Fackenheim* —

AZ QUOTES

The Nature of God: Jewish Perspectives



God was not present in Auschwitz; the voice that was heard was the voice of the devil.

No theological turning-point: 'Jews find in the Holocaust no new definition of Jewish identity because we need none. Nothing has changed. The tradition endures' (Jacob Neusner).

Jewish Perspectives

'I'll tell you, the problem I have with Job is, number one, the children. The ending of Job is superficially happy. He has children again. He gets everything he used to have in excess. He is saturated... I have often thought about this ending, and about the children lost at the beginning of the story. How does it speak to those of us who have experienced great loss and then find our lives again, those of us who survive? The only explanation I can find is in our generation's children. They saw them go away, never to return' (Ellie Wiesel).

"It all happened so fast.
The ghetto.
The deportation.
The sealed cattle car.
The fiery altar upon which the history of our people and the future of mankind were meant to be sacrificed."

— Elie Wiesel

VirtualJerusalem.com



FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING
WE MUST BEAR WITNESS

ELIE WIESEL

To forget the
dead would be
akin to killing
them a second
time.

Elie Wiesel

meetville.com



What is abnormal is that I am normal. That I survived the Holocaust and went on to love beautiful girls, to talk, to write, to have toast and tea and live my life — that is what is abnormal.

(Elie Wiesel)

izquotes.com

Jewish Perspectives

‘Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon. Without the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and Christian violence against Jews, Nazi ideology could not have taken hold nor could it have been carried out.... but Nazism itself was not an inevitable outcome of Christianity’ (*Dabru Emet*, 2000).

DABRU EMET

A JEWISH STATEMENT ON CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY

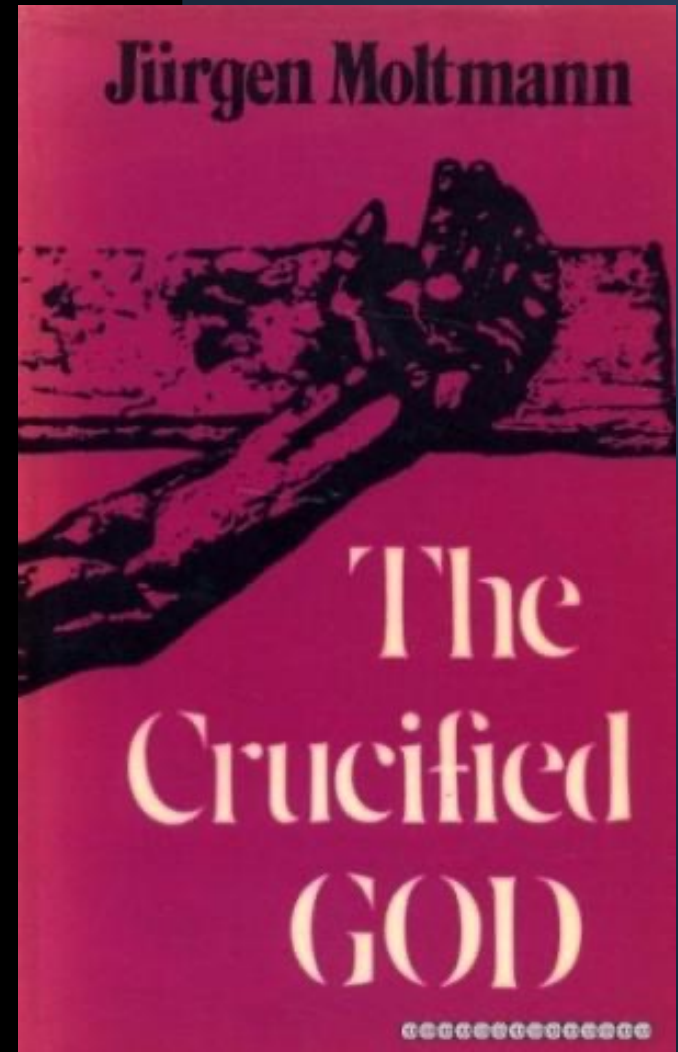
In recent years, there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish and Christian relations. Throughout the nearly two millennia of Jewish exile, Christians have tended to characterize Judaism as a failed religion or, at best, a religion that prepared the way for, and is completed in, Christianity. In the decades since the Holocaust, however, Christianity has changed dramatically. An increasing number of official Church bodies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have made public statements of their remorse about Christian mistreatment of Jews and Judaism. These statements have declared, furthermore, that Christian teaching and preaching can and must be reformed so that they acknowledge God's enduring covenant with the Jewish people and celebrate the contribution of Judaism to world civilization and to Christian faith itself.

We believe these changes merit a thoughtful Jewish response. Speaking only for ourselves – an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars – we believe it is time for Jews to learn about the efforts of Christians to honor Judaism. We believe it is time for Jews to reflect on what Judaism may now say about Christianity. As a first step, we offer eight brief statements about how Jews and Christians may relate to one another.

The Nature of God: Christian Perspectives

Is the belief in an omnipotent God not inconsistent given that God failed to intervene in Auschwitz?

Did God suffer with his people? This became the view after the Shoah and the experience of Jews in the concentration camps. See especially Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (1974): God suffers in every disaster that befalls his children.



The Ten Points of Seelisberg

- International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) who met in Seelisberg in Switzerland in 1947.
- Emphasis on the Jewish character of Jesus and his first followers.
- They share the following commandments: love of God and love of fellow beings.
- The portrayal of Jews as the enemies of Christ must be avoided.

Nostra Aetate (1965)

- New attitude of the Catholic Church towards Jews and Judaism.
- Condemnation of anti-Semitism.
- Rejection of the accusation that Jews alone were responsible for the death of Jesus.
- God has not rejected the Jews.

It [Nostra Aetate] terminated in a stroke a millennial teaching of contempt of Jews and Judaism and unequivocally asserted the Church's debt to its Jewish heritage' (Edward Flannery).



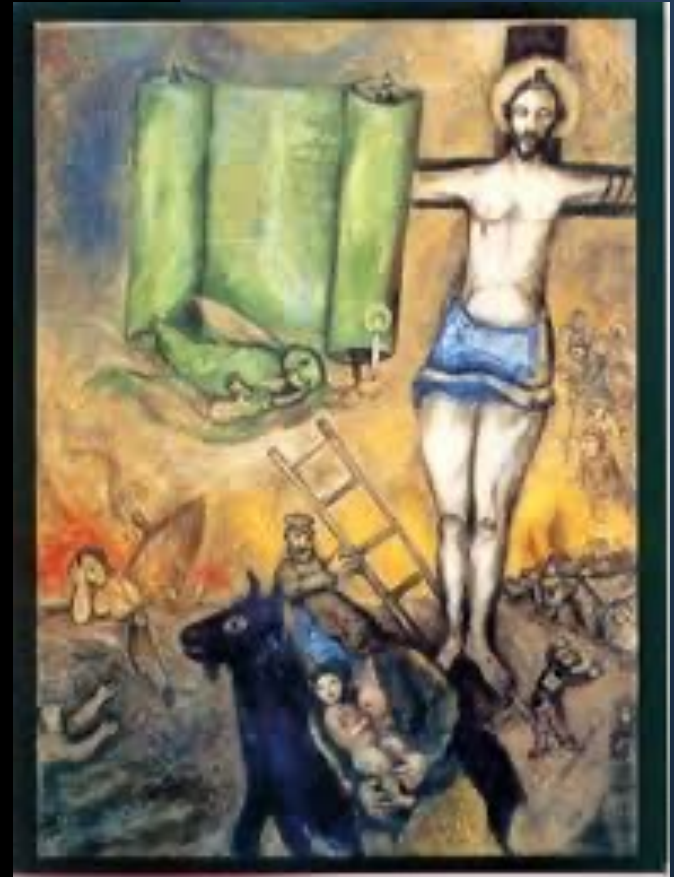
Supersessionist Theology

- A consistent theme in Christianity: the Church has replaced the synagogue (cf. Melito, Martin Luther).
- Note the response of some members of the World Council of Churches (Commission of Faith and Order, 1967): 'It is not enough merely to assert some kind of continuity between the present-day Jews – whether religious or not – and ancient Israel, but that they actually are still Israel'.
- *Nostra Aetate* (1965): the privileges of the Jews must continue.
- The Lambeth Conference (1988): 'Judaism is a living and still developing religion'.

The old covenant and the new covenant? Who is the 'true Israel'?

Covenant (*berith*): God establishes a relationship with his people; they are to behave as covenantal partners. It is an agreement based on relationship.

For Christians God establishes a new covenant on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians are the elect people of God.



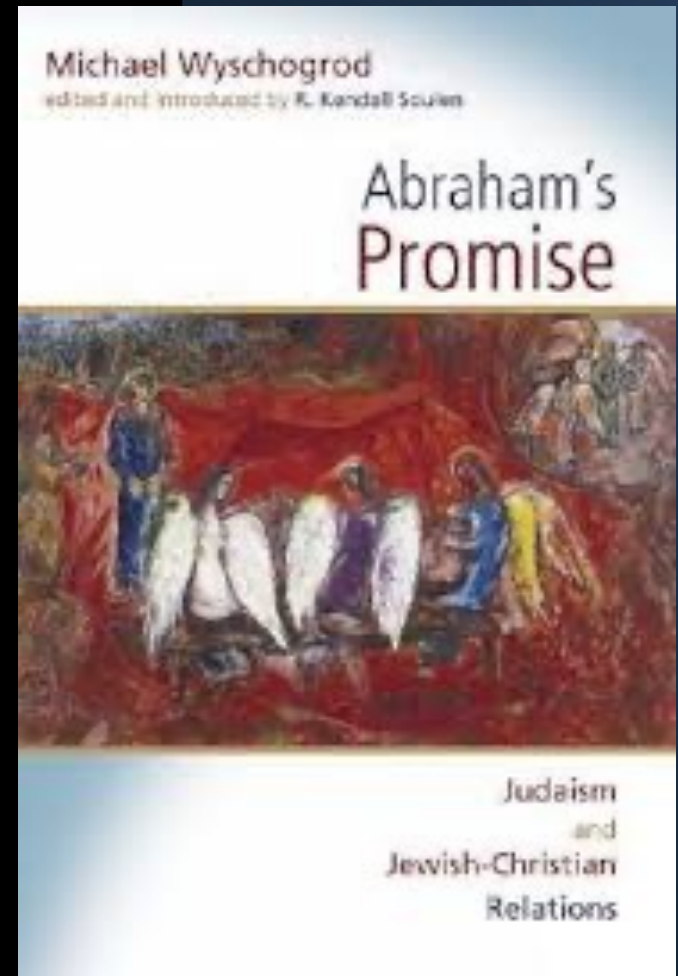
The Covenant: Jewish-Christian Perspectives

One covenant (one people) comprising of Jews and Christians. God continues to reveal himself in and through modern Judaism; Jesus Christ gives Gentiles the opportunity to establish a relationship with the God of Abraham. Not all expectations have been fulfilled in Christ.

The Covenant: Jewish-Christian Perspectives

Two covenants (people) side by side – Sinai and Calvary – and they are of equal value.

Franz Rosenzweig: God reveals himself to Jews and to Christians.



Charges of deicide

Auschwitz was the response of the Nazis to Jewish deicide. 'The Holocaust was God's vengeance and retribution because they rejected Christ and crucified him; they cannot blame anyone other than themselves' (The Evangelical Church of Germany).

The Jews of the present should not be blamed for the failings of their past fathers (what about the responsibility of the Romans according to the gospel narratives?). This is the emphasis in the *Nostra aetate*.



Mission

- Incorporation of the Jews in the missionary work of the Church, but without giving them particular attention.
- Others suppose that the focus should be on the Jews because a) theirs is a dead religion; b) the conversion of the Jews will promote the second coming of the Messiah; c) the only way for them to receive forgiveness.
- However, not all the Protestant churches embrace this view. The two religions can exist side by side without being fused together.

The Lambeth Conference (1988)

‘All these approaches, however, share a common concern to be sensitive to Judaism, to reject all proselytizing, that is, aggressive and manipulative attempts to convert, and of course, any hint of antisemitism. Further, Jews, Muslims and Christians have a common mission. They share a mission to the world that God’s name may be honoured’.

