Evangelical Review of Theology

EDITOR: DAVID PARKER

Volume 29 · Number 1 · January 2005

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by

PATERNOSTER PERIODICALS

for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

ERT (2005) 29:1, 52-76

The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy:
an Evangelical Perspective

John Jefferson Davis

KEYWORDS: *Holocaust, theodicy, evangelical theology, suffering, Jewish-Christian relations*

'GIVEN THE ENORMITY of the horror represented by Auschwitz … the question of how a just and powerful God could allow the annihilation of so many innocent lives haunts the religious conscience and staggers the imagination.'[1] This statement by leaders of Conservative Judaism in the United States exemplifies the tremendous challenge posed by the Holocaust to Jewish and Christian faith alike. In the last generation, Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant thinkers have struggled to make some theological sense of a horrible reality that for some has brought traditional faith to the breaking point.[2]

The purpose of this article is to reflect, from a Protestant Evangelical standpoint, on the implications of the Holocaust for traditional theodicies, and to propose a *martyreo-eschatological* hermeneutic for addressing the issues.[3] The term 'martyreo-eschatological' suggests that the concepts of *martyrdom* and the *eschatological intensification of evil* may provide some

1 *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1988), p. 25.

2 Some of the representative literature will be surveyed below. As will be noted, systematic reflection on the Holocaust by Evangelical theologians has been quite limited.

3 It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the issue of alleged 'Anti-semitism in the New Testament'; for a helpful review and assessment of the literature on this issue, see James Dunn, 'The Question of Anti-semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period', in James Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 177-211.

***Dr. John Jefferson Davis**, an ordained Presbyterian minister, is professor of systematic theology and Christian ethics at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, USA. A former president of the Evangelical Philosophical Society, Dr. Davis earned his PhD in systematic theology at Duke University and is the author of several well-known books, including* Theology Primer *(Baker),* Foundations of Evangelical Theology *(Baker),* Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today *(Presbyterian and Reformed), and numerous articles in scholarly journals.*

points of departure from which theological reflection on this massive eruption of radical evil may proceed.

From the outset the enormously painful and difficult nature of the issue must be acknowledged. It is recognized that for many, only a respectful silence for the dead, or an appeal to divine inscrutability, or even the abandonment of any traditional belief in divine providence and the existence of the biblical God, are all possible responses to this enormous tragedy. For some, it would seem presumptuous for those who did not personally live through the years of the Holocaust to attempt to theologize about these events. Nevertheless, a generation after the event, it would seem intellectually, historically, and theologically irresponsible for evangelical theologians to remain silent in the face of the most catastrophic event of the twentieth century, one which arguably poses the most severe challenge to traditional beliefs about the goodness, power, and wisdom of God. Consequently, this article is being offered as a preliminary contribution in that direction, in the hope that it might promote a wider range of evangelical reflection on the issues raised by the Holocaust for Christian theology and Christian-Jewish relations.

This article presupposes that the reader has some general historical knowledge of the Holocaust,[4] and some awareness of the tragic legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in the history of the Christian church.[5] After surveying representative Christian and Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust to date, a proposal for a *martyreo-eschatological* hermeneutic will be advanced.

Roman Catholic and Mainline Protestant Responses:

The 1964 'Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions' (*Nostra Aetate*) at the Second Vatican Council represented a major rethinking of prior Roman Catholic attitudes towards Judaism and the Jewish people in the new post-Holocaust historical context.[6] Citing Romans 11:28-29, the declaration

4 For general studies of the Holocaust, see Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: The Jewish Tragedy* (London: Collins, 1986); Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961); Israel Gutman, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust,* 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1990); S.T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context,* vol.1, *The Holocaust and Mass Death Before the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). *Night*, by Elie Wiesel (New York: Bantam, 1960), remains one of the most powerful descriptions by a Holocaust survivor of the horror of the concentration camps.

5 See especially the seminal works of Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), and Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974); see also James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York: Atheneum, 1974); Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-three Centuries of anti-Semitism* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).

6 For a helpful survey of Christian attitudes toward Judaism over two millenia of church history, see Graham Keith, 'A Rival, a Relative, or Both? Differing Christian Stances Toward Judaism over Two Millennia', *Evangelical Quarterly* 75:2 (2003): 133-156.

affirmed that '… the Jews still remain most dear to God because of their fathers, nor does He repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.'[7] Repudiating the ancient charges of 'deicide', the Council stated that the death of Christ could not be blamed upon '… all the Jews then living, without distinction, nor upon the Jews of today'. The Jewish people should not be represented as repudiated or cursed by God; the church '… deplores the hatred, persecution, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source'.[8] The statement did not directly acknowledge the church's own historical role in the development of anti-Judaic atttitudes, nor did it address the sensitive issue of Pope Pius XII's failure to actively seek protection for Jews during the years of the Holocaust.[9]

In 1982 Pope John Paul II directed the bishops to study relations between the Church and Judaism and to seek ways to teach about Judaism '… free from prejudices and without any offences.. with full awareness of the heritage common to Jews and Christians'.[10] The liturgy was to be purged of anti-Judaic references, and Roman Catholics were admonished to '… rid ourselves of the traditional idea of a people *punished,* preserved as a living argument for Christian apologetic', and were to be reminded that the enduring existence of the Jewish people has been accompanied by a 'continuous spiritual fecundity in the rabbinical period, in the Middle Ages and in modern times'.[11] These post-Holocaust revisions of Roman Catholic attitudes and teachings were inspired, in significant measure, by the seminal historical research of Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt,* cited above.

Mainline Protestant theologians since the 1960s have called for the revision of Christian theology in light of the Holocaust. Notable among these calls for revision have been the efforts of Franklin Littell, Paul van Buren, and Clark Williamson. In *The Crucifixion of the Jews* Littell stated that the Holocaust '… is the unfinished business of the Christian churches, the running sore unattended by its leaders …. The most important event in recent generations of church history, it is still virtually ignored in church school lessons and carefully avoided by preachers in their pulpits.'[12] In Littell's estimation, the Holocaust and the subsequent emergence of the state of Israel in 1948 should be viewed as basic events

7 In Walter M. Abbot, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Corpus Books, 1966), p. 664.

8 *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 666, 667.

9 On the role of Pius XII, see Saul Friedlander, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: a Documentation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.

10 Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, 'Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church,' www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/

11 'Notes on the Correct Way'. For further reflections on the Holocaust by contemporary Roman Catholic theologians, see Michael McGarry, *Christology after the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977); John T. Palikowski, *Christ in Light of Jewish-Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

12 Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 129.

in Christian history of the same order of importance as the Exodus, Sinai, and the fall of Rome.[13] The very credibility of the Christian faith in a post-Holocaust world hinges, according to Littell, on the ability of the Christian church to come to terms with the legacy of its anti-Judaic past.

The most comprehensive and systematic attempt to date to reconstruct Christian theology in a post-Holocaust setting, and from the standpoint of God's continuing covenant with Israel (cf. Rom.11:29, 'God has not forsaken his people whom he foreknew'), is the multi-volume work by Paul van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality.*[14] Van Buren believes that through Jesus Christ the Gentiles enter into the salvation already available to the Jews through the covenant with Abraham. There are thus two valid covenants of salvation: a covenant with the Jews through Abraham and the Torah, and a covenant for the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.[15] The salvation of Gentile Christians presupposes the covenant with Abraham and is dependent upon it (cf. Gal.3:6-9). The facts of history compel Christians to acknowledge that the redemption that they have come to know in Christ has not yet been fully realized, and that the fullness of redemption still lies in the future.[16] In the meantime, Christians are called to be partners with God and with the Jewish people to work for the *renewal of creation* while history still proceeds.[17]

The work of Clark Williamson, a Disciples of Christ professsor of theology at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, also represents a substantial attempt at reconstructive Christian theology in a post-Holocaust setting.[18] In his earlier book published in 1982, *Has God Rejected His People?,* the answer to the question posed by the title is an emphatic 'No'. Williamson documents the growth of anti-Judaic attitudes in the Christian church from the time of the early apologists and church fathers down to the twentieth century.[19]

In his subsequent book of 1993, *A Guest in the House of Israel,* he develops a 'post-Holocaust church theology' in which the loci of biblical authority,

13 Littell, 'Christendom, Holocaust and Israel: the Importance for Christians of Recent Major Events in Jewish History', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (1973): 483-497 at 497.

14 Paul M. van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality,* 3 pts. (New York: Seabury Press, 1980-88). Part One: *Discerning the Way* (1980); Part Two: *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel* (1983); Part Three: *Christ in Context* (1988).

15 The apostle Paul, however, in Romans 10:1, does not assume that the Jewish people are already saved through the covenant with Abraham, but need to recognize Jesus as Messiah in order to be saved: 'Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.'

16 van Buren, Pt. One, *Discerning the Way,* p. 194.

17 van Buren, Pt. Two, *A Christian Theology of the People of Israel,* p. 351.

18 A helpful review of Williamson and other recent post-Holocaust theologies is found in Beverly Asbury and Matthew C. Hawk, 'Recent Perspectives on the Holocaust', *Religious Studies Review* 22:3 (1996): 197-207.

19 Clark M. Williamson, *Has God Rejected His People? Anti-Judaism in the Christian Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982). Note especially chapter five, 'From Barnabas to Barth: Theological Anti-Judaism', pp. 89-105.

covenant, Christology, and ecclesiology are reformulated in light of the anti-Judaic heritage which Williamson sees as sources of distortion of Christian teaching in these critical areas. The Christologies of Nicea and Chalcedon are too abstract; it must be affirmed that God was incarnate not merely in a generic human nature, but in the 'Jew Jesus'.[20] The claim that Jesus is the 'only Savior' may be understood to mean that '… the God who disclosed God's self to us in Jesus Christ is the only God there is'[21]—not that Jews must believe in Jesus to be saved. For Williamson, the mission of the church to Israel is not one of proclamation (*kerygma*), but one of service (*diakonia*); the 'Great Commission' (Mt.28:16-20) authorizes an evangelistic mission to the Gentiles, not to the Jewish people.[22]

Williamson also believes that the massive suffering of the Jewish people in the Holocaust puts into question the traditional notions of an omnipotent and impassible God found in classical theism. A Whiteheadian, process-relational model of God, he believes, in which God suffers with his creation and limits his own power in the interests of the creatures' freedom is more adequate to the biblical tradition and the facts of experience. 'Because each creature has its own God-given power of self-creation, God is the necessary but not the sufficient cause of any event'[23]; God can not be held solely responsible for the Holocaust.

Jewish Responses:

Jewish reflections on the Holocaust have elicited a broad range of interpretations, ranging from atheism to theories of divine retribution, with most responses falling between these two extremes.[24] This brief survey will attempt to highlight only the major Jewish theological responses represented by Richard Rubenstein, Irving Greenberg, Emil Fackenheim, and Eliezer Berkovits.

Writing from an ultra-Orthodox perspective, the late Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum of the Satmar Hasidic community claimed that the Holocaust was God's punishment of the Jewish people for the sins of 'Reformers and secularists' who had betrayed the tradition.[25]

20 Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p.173. It should be noted, of course, that one can affirm *both* a Chalcedonian two-nature Christology *and* the Jewishness of Jesus: the categories are not mutually exclusive.

21 Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, p.200.

22 Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, pp.250, 251.

23 Williamson, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, p. 224. For a critique of process theism from an evangelical perspective, see Royce Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God: Biblical Faith and the Challenge of Process Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), and John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: the Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), pp. 149-179, 'Process Theology'.

24 For an insightful survey and analysis by a Jewish scholar of Jewish reflections on the Holocaust, see Dan Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust', *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 277-293.

25 Cited by Rabbi David Novak, 'David Klinghofer and His Critics: An Exchange', *First Things* (August/September 1998), p. 8.; see also Novak, 'Arguing Israel and the Holocaust', *First Things* (January 2001), pp. 11-14 at 12.

For Rabbi Teitelbaum, the most grievous of these sins of Reform and secularism was *Zionism* and support for the secular state of Israel, which represented an arrogant human attempt to bring about a reality that only God could accomplish through his chosen Messiah. This 'divine retribution' interpretation has been repudiated by the vast majority of the Jewish community.

Richard's Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz* (1966) was a major Jewish response to the Holocaust. He stated his position in the starkest of terms:

> I believe the greatest single challenge to modern Judaism arises out of the question of God and the death camps.. how can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology … has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, antihuman explosion in all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept.[26]

For Rubenstein, the Holocaust has made it impossible to continue to believe in the God of traditional Judaism who is personally and providentially involved in history and who has chosen the Jewish people.[27] Judaism, he believes, can continue to exist even without traditional theistic beliefs on the basis of rituals and customs that enable its adherents to celebrate the events of the life cycle and to cope with its crises. The majority of the Jewish community, not surprisingly, have not followed Rubenstein and his non-theistic conclusions.[28]

The 1974 paper of Irving Greenberg, 'Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust', has been frequently cited in subsequent discussions.[29] Greenberg believes that any responses to the Holocaust are inevitably dialectical in nature, filled with 'extraordinary human and moral tensions'.[30] The painful memories must

26 Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 153.

27 Strictly speaking, Rubenstein might not consider himself an 'atheist'. Even though he believes that we '… stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purpose beyond our own resources', (p. 152), he can still say that he believes in 'God' in the sense of a 'Holy Nothingness', presumably known to the mystics of all ages, 'out of which we have come and to which we will ultimately return'(p. 154).

28 As Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust', p.280, has noted, given Rubenstein's perspective, there would seem to be little motivation to remain Jewish, if there is no God who has chosen the Jewish people or revealed a divinely authorized Torah on Sinai.

29 Irving Greenberg, in Eva Fleischner, ed., *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1977), pp. 7-55.

30 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p. 54.

not be forgotten, but transformed into sources of responsibility, will, and faith.[31] The horrors of the Holocaust evoke a principle that for any future theology, 'No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children'.[32]

Christians need to honestly ask themselves the question, 'What did Christianity contribute to make the Holocaust possible?' The very harsh historical judgments which answering this question may visit upon Christianity opens the possibility, Greenberg believes, of 'freeing the Gospel of Love from the incubus of evil and hatred'.[33] The Holocaust is a 'wake-up call' to Christians to recognize the tragic legacy of Christian anti-Judaism.

Greenberg argues that the Holocaust reveals the moral and philosophical bankruptcy of 'modernity' and western civilization in its twentieth-century forms. The Holocaust calls upon Jews and Christians alike to resist 'the total authority of this cultural moment', and to reassert the divine claims of their own religious traditions that set limits on the absolutist claims of human scientific and political systems.[34]

Religious thought cannot 'explain' the Holocaust, but religious faith after the event must seek to 'create, save, and heal the image of God wherever it still exists'. After Auschwitz, Greenberg believes, the continued existence of the Jewish people and the reborn state of Israel are 'renewed testimony to Exodus as ultimate reality, to God's continuing presence in history'.[35] Despite Hitler's attempt to annihilate them, the Jewish people still exist, and the re-creation of the state of Israel shows that 'God's promises are still reliable'.[36]

Of all the Jewish responses to the Holocaust, arguably the most influential has been that of Emil Fackenheim, the distinguished philosopher and Reformed rabbi who left his native Germany in 1939 after imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp in Sachenhausen.[37] Fackenheim's reflections have been set forth in various books and articles, most notably in *God's Presence in History* (1970) and *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Thought* (1982). Even though Fackenheim can no longer affirm traditional Jewish notions of election and covenant, and rejects the idea that the Holocaust was a divine punishment for sin, he neverthelesss believes that the 'Divine Presence' was somehow present in the Holocaust—not as a 'redeeming Voice' but as a 'commanding Voice'. In one of the most widely quoted passages written by any modern Jewish author, Fackenheim stated that Jews today must hear a '614th commandment' beyond the traditional 613 commandments of the Torah:

31 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.55.
32 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.23.
33 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, pp.11, 25. Greenberg has in mind the legacy of Christian anti-Judaism documented by Isaac, Ruether, Parkes, Flannery, and others.
34 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.31.
35 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, pp.42, 48.
36 Greenberg, *Auschwitz*, p.50.
37 For a helpful discussion and critical response to Fackenheim's perspective, see Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz,* pp. 316-29.

'Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories':

> They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish … they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish … A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.[38]

This memorable statement achieved remarkable resonance in the Jewish community, eliciting heartfelt responses among many who were not conversant with Fackenheim's less accessible philosophical thought.

For Fackenheim, no adequate philosophical or theological explanation for the Holocaust is possible, but it can and must be affirmed that the Nazi 'logic of destruction' was resisted by brave men and women who maintained a sense of human dignity even in the midst of the most brutal and dehumanizing conditions of the death camps.[39] The 'mending' (*Tikkun)* of the unspeakable 'rupture' in Jewish life caused by the Holocaust cannot be overcome in thought alone, but only in the continuance of Jewish life, represented centrally by the commitment to the existence of the state of Israel. The existence of the state of Israel is a sign of the Jewish people's 'emergence from powerlessness'[40] and a witness to the fact that Hitler's program did not ultimately prevail.

A response to the Holocaust from an Orthodox Jewish perspective is presented in Eliezer Berkovits's *Faith after the Holocaust.*[41] For Berkovits, the paradigm for faith in the face of the Holocaust is to be found in the biblical figure of Job: 'We must believe, because our brother Job believed; and we must question, because our brother Job so often could not believe any longer. This is not a comfortable situation; but it is our condition in this era after the Holocaust.'[42]

For Berkovits, even though there is no rational justification of God's ways

---

38 Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 84.

39 Fackenheim cites the eloquent testimony of Pelagia Lewinska, a Polish Holocaust survivor:

> 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 … They wished to abase us, to destroy our human dignity, to efface every vestige of our humanity … to fill us with horror and contempt toward ourselves and our fellows … From the instant when I grasped the motivating principle.. it was as if I had been awakened from a dream … *I felt under orders to live* …And if I did die in Auschwitz, it would be as a human being, I would hold on to my dignity. I was not going to become the contemptible, disgusting brute my enemy wished me to be … And a terrible struggle began which went on day and night.

Cited in *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), p. 25.

40 Fackenheim, *To Mend the World*, p. 304.

41 Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1973).

42 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.5.

with Israel, faith must still be maintained in spite of 'God's terrible silence' during the Holocaust.[43] The Jew living after Auschwitz must '… make room for the impenetrable darkness of the death camps' within his faith; this darkness will accent the light of faith yet affirmed.[44]

Even though the ways of God remain inscrutable, the heroism of many of the victims of the Holocaust must not be forgotten. The categories of martyrdom and *Kiddush haShem* ('sanctification of the Name') are meaningful and relevant. For Berkovits, nowhere else has faith and a conviction about the transcendent meaning of life been '… vindicated as nobly and heroically as in the ghettos and the concentration camps, in the very dominion of their worst denial and degradation'.[45] God may have been silent, but faith was not absent even in the smoke and the fires of the death camps.[46]

Evangelical Responses:

For the most part, Evangelical theologians have not engaged in sustained systematic reflection on the Holocaust.[47] The most substantial contributions by evangelicals on the topic have been from the perspective of social ethics, rather than discussions of theodicy as such.[48] Three articles by Daniel Fuller, Stephen T. Davis, and John J. Johnson that directly address the theodicy question will be noted here.

In his 1964 article, 'Why Was There an Auschwitz?', Daniel P. Fuller, then dean of the faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, stated that the ultimate question posed by the Holocaust is not '… why the Pope [Pius XII] failed to protest against Hitler's slaying of the Jews, but why God allowed an Auschwitz'.[49] Fuller's answer is based on his reading of Deuteronomy 28, with its stipulations of covenant blessings and curses for Israel. Israel had been scattered among the nations and had suffered disasters such as the Holocaust because '… she repeatedly failed to love God with all her heart, soul, and mind'.

The Holocaust was a divine punish-

43 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.85.
44 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.70.
45 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p.84.
46 Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust,' p.284, comments that Berkovits's challenge to believe in spite of overwhelming obstacles does not address the fundamental theological difficulties. He thinks that Berkovits offers no help to those who '… are unable to follow Job's example, and instead seek a viable Jewish theodicy, in which the justice and righteousness of God are defended in the face of evil and suffering'.

47 For example, in his recent 802 page work on the doctrine of God, John S. Feinberg, in *No One Like Him: the Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), interacts ably with a broad range of contemporary thought, but makes no mention of the Holocaust in the chapter on 'Divine Providence and Evil'.
48 See, for example, David A. Rausch, *A Legacy of Hatred: Why Christians Must Not Forget the Holocaust* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), and most notably, David P. Gushee, *The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).
49 Daniel P. Fuller, 'Why Was There an Auschwitz?' *Eternity* 15 (Dec. 1964): 27-28, 32 at 28.

ment for breaking the covenant. It is not that the Jewish people are worse than other people, but God permitted the Holocaust to impress upon humankind the 'horror of their idolatry' and to show all men '… what their fate will be unless they repent of their worship of the creature and come instead to worship the Creator'.[50] Fuller's perspective on the Holocaust as a 'divine punishment of the Jews' parallels and continues some of the elements of the anti-Judaic theology of the early church fathers and middle ages.

In his 1981 article, 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology',[51] Stephen T. Davis, then on the faculty at Claremont Men's College, was willing to agree that the Christian church was in some measure directly and indirectly implicated in the rise of modern antisemitism. While it may be the case that the Christian church in general contributed to antisemitism, Davis went further in hypothesizing that the nineteenth-century liberal criticism of the Old Testament in particular helped to sever the church from its Jewish roots, undercut the divine authority of the Bible, and weakened belief in the uniqueness of the Jews as God's chosen people—thus helping prepare the way for Hitler's extermination of the Jews.[52]

While some 'Holocaust theologians' have been ready to revise basic Christian doctrines for the sake of better relations with the Jewish community, Davis forthrightly stated that it is unrealistic and unreasonable for Jews or liberal Christians to expect that evangelicals will alter their most basic convictions in the interests of ecumenical dialogue. While making common cause against antisemitism in all its forms, evangelicals will continue to believe that '… Jesus is the messiah and Son of God and that those who deny it are mistaken'.[53] While not singling out Jews as a special object of evangelism, evangelicals will continue to insist on their right to preach the gospel to Jews as well as other people, 'and will doubtless continue to do so'.[54] Davis thus defended the historic evangelical stance on Christology and evangelism, but did not directly address the *theodicy* question as such.

John T. Johnson's 2001 article published in the *Tyndale Bulletin,* 'Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of Good and Evil?' interacts with the previous work of Jewish and Christian scholars. He is aware of the revisionist Holocaust theologies of Clark Williamson and Paul van Buren, but unwilling to accept their premise that the Holocaust requires a fundamental restructuring of Christian theology.

50 Fuller, 'Why Was There an Auschwitz?, p. 32. Fuller does not comment on the fact that many Holocaust victims were not *secular* Jews, but more observant Orthodox Jews from eastern Europe.

51 First published in the *American Journal of Philosophy* 2:3 (1981):121-129; reprinted in Richard W. Rousseau, *Christianity and Judaism: The Deepening Dialogue* (Scranton, PA: Ridge Row Press, 1983), pp.107-115.

52 Davis 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology', p. 111.

53 Davis 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology', p. 109.

54 Davis 'Evangelical Christians and Holocaust Theology', p. 114.

While the Holocaust represents 'one of the most demonic expressions of human evil the world has yet witnessed', and was connected to centuries of Christian antisemitism, Johnson believes that this horrible event was not utterly different from other instances of massive suffering in human history. He cites the Black Death of the middle ages, which killed one-third of Europe's population; the Taiping Rebellion in China of the 1850s, killing twenty million, and the Chinese civil war of the 1930s and 1940s, which may have consumed somewhere between 34 and 62 million lives.[55]

Johnson finds in the book of Job a paradigm for reflecting on the Holocaust. Johnson admits that instances of evil that have no apparent good purpose can 'dishearten even the most devout among us', and that in such cases honesty requires us to simply admit that we do not know why such things happen.[56] At the end, Johnson's answers to the question posed in the title of his article is 'No': the Holocaust does not and should not be the basis for fundamental revision in an evangelical understanding of either God or evil. Christian faith must be maintained even in the face of gratuitous and massive evil, and the challenge of such evil for faith would be '… just as vexing had the Holocaust never happened'.[57]

Theodicies: Representative Approaches

Before presenting the proposal for a 'martyreo-eschatological' hermeneutical framework, four other possible perspectives on the Holocaust and theodicy will be briefly noted: a 'non-theodicy' approach; 'divine retribution' theories; 'greater good' theories; and the 'limited God' proposals of process theology and 'Open Theism'.[58]

'Divine Inscrutability': John J. Johnson

Under the heading of 'non-theodicies' could be included those authors who opt either for some form of atheism or divine inscrutability. As we have seen above, John J. Johnson is a representative of the latter option, ultimately appealing to divine inscrutability: evil must finally be accepted in faith as an 'impenetrable mystery' for which no theodicy or rational explanation can be forthcoming. It could be said that such an approach could be supported by the overall message of the book of Job, where in the final analysis Job reaffirms his faith in God in the face of inex-

55 Johnson, 'Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of God and Evil?' *Tyndale Bulletin* 51:2 (2001): 117-128 at 123.

56 Johnson, Holocaust, p.126.

57 Johnson, Holocaust, p.128. Johnson points out that the revisionists who use *historical experience* to revise theological doctrine seem somewhat inconsistent in apparently not giving sufficient weight to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and its subsequent military successes as signs of God's continuing providence: p. 127.

58 On the question of theodicy generally, see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977. See also Alvin Plantinga, 'Suffering and Evil', in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 458-499, and also by Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

plicable suffering, despite not having received direct answers to his questions posed to God. Further, it might be said that this perspective recognizes the fundamentally *irrational* nature of evil, which inherently places limitations on any human attempts to rationalize its existence, nature, or extent.[59]

Nevertheless, an appeal to divine inscrutability as the theological 'bottom line' would appear to be unsatisfactory. Those who appeal to divine inscrutability also generally appeal to the believer to maintain faith in the face of radical and massive evil such as the Holocaust—without *giving reasons why such faith should be maintained.* Without some rational justification for maintaining faith, this approach devolves into bare fideism.

'Non-Theodicy': Richard Rubenstein

The atheistic response to the Holocaust of Rubenstein represents another possible 'non-theodicy'. For Rubenstein, the radical evil of the Nazi extermination of the Jews puts into question not merely the goodness or power of God, but the very existence of the God of the Jewish and Christian Bible. To state the obvious, Rubenstein's approach is not a viable option for those who wish to maintain belief in the existence of the God attested in the scriptures.

Nevertheless, it could be said that Rubenstein's perspective has the merit of avoiding a bare fideism—a stance which would make religious faith immune from all empirical considerations. If Christian faith is grounded in historical events such as the resurrection of Jesus, then in principle, faith must be open to the risks of events in history (such as the Holocaust) which could put that faith in question.[60] From an Orthodox Jewish perspective, Exodus and Sinai, and for historic Christian belief, the Cross and Resurrection—and for both perspectives, the re-emergence of the modern state of Israel—continue, despite the Holocaust, to provide warrant for belief in a God who is present in history. God's ways are indeed inscrutable in the sense that no finite human understanding can completely comprehend the infinite ways of God; nevertheless, attempts at partial understandings can appeal to such evidences in history that are relevant to religious belief.

'Divine Retribution': Teitelbaum and Fuller

The responses of Teitelbaum and Fuller[61] are examples of 'divine retribution' theodicies: the Holocaust was a

59 This point concerning the irrational nature of sin has been expounded by G.C. Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971).

60 In a frequently cited discussion of 'Theology and Falsification,' the philosopher Anthony Flew pointed out that if there are *no possible conditions* under which the believer would question a proposition such as 'God is a loving Father,' then it is hard to see how such a belief remains a meaningful proposition: in Anthony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 96-98.

61 Cited in n. 24 (Teitelbaum) and n. 48 (Fuller) above.

punishment for the sins of the Jewish people. Such analyses seem inadequate, and even harsh and simplistic for a number of reasons. While it is certainly true that all human beings are inherently sinful and subject to punishment, biblical texts such as the book of Job and Jesus' teachings in Luke 13:1-5 and John 9:1-3 warn of the dangers of too quickly concluding that an individual's suffering is a direct consequence of personal sin. There may in fact be other factors to consider.

On the hypothesis of the Holocaust as a direct act of divine retribution, is it to be supposed that the victims at Auschwitz were more wicked than those who happened to survive? If the victims of the Holocaust were 'targets' of God's justice, how accurate was the 'targeting'? What of the fact that many of the victims were the more observant and pious Jews of Eastern Europe? Is a scenario in which God punishes more severely the pious and spares the wicked a vindication of God's justice, or a compounding of the problem? And from this perspective, is it to be supposed that God's wrath was being poured out on the Jewish babies who were incinerated in the gas chambers, while the babies of their Nazi tormentors were spared? Does such a perspective in fact vindicate divine justice, or does it leave us with a picture of a 'just' God who appears to be arbitrary, cruel, and even sadistic?

Daniel Fuller's appeal to Deuteronomy 28 to support the divine-retribution understanding seems problematic. The text states that the curses of exile and judgment will be the result of 'not obeying the Lord your God and not following his commandments' (28:15). Such covenant curses were experienced by the Jewish people during the Exile and Babylonian captivity as a result of the sins of *apostasy* and *idolatry*. The observant Jews who perished in the Holocaust died as victims who had not forsaken the God of Abraham or the law of Moses, but as those who were willing to 'sanctify the Name' and were ready to die for their faith.[62]

Any biblical interpretation which moves directly from the premise 'God punishes Israel for forsaking the God of Abraham and the Torah' (28:15) to 'the Holocaust is God's punishment for Jews who have not accepted Jesus as Messiah' should not be accepted without much more justification than is usually provided.[63] A 'Jewish rejection of Jesus' explanation of the Holocaust is also highly problematic in light of the murky picture of Jesus culturally and historically available to European Jewry. After 1500 years of church history sadly marked by anti-Judaic attitudes, pogroms, Talmud-burning, and the Crusades, how would such a 'gospel' be perceived by a typical European Jew? Had the Jewish people heard a clear and winsome message of faith?

---

62 As will be argued below, the category of *martyrdom* rather than retribution would seem to be a more helpful way of understanding the horrible injustices perpetrated by the Nazis.

63 These comments move beyond Fuller, who said that the Jews, like all people, are guilty of failing to 'love God with all.. heart, soul, and mind' ('Why Was There an Auschwitz?' p. 32,), and hence were punished as an example. Fuller does not *specifically* argue that 'not believing in Jesus' is the preeminent expression of this apostasy, though such a conclusion has been frequently drawn in Christian church history.

Would the justice of God be vindicated by seeing the Holocaust as God's severe judgment on the Jewish people for rejecting a portrait of Jesus so marred by the darker sides of Christian history? Such explanations raise more questions about the justice of God than they resolve.

'Free Will' and 'Greater Good': Hick and Kushner

Historically, most theodicies have appealed to various forms of the 'free will defence' or theories of a 'greater good.' John Hick, for example, is one of many who have argued that the power of moral choice is inherent in the meaning of personhood: 'God is able to create beings of any and every conceivable kind; but creatures who lack moral freedom … would not be what we mean by persons.'[64] The power of moral choice is the power to choose evil as well as good, and the possibility that humans would misuse their freedom was inherent in the creation of the human race.

Rabbi Harold Kushner appealed to the free will defence in his best-selling book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People.* Man is free to choose good, but this also means that he must be free to choose evil.[65] Some choose to do evil on a small scale, but in the Holocaust Hitler and those who followed him chose to do evil on a massive scale. God did not intervene because God '… does not control man's choosing between good and evil.'[66] Hitler, not God, should be blamed for the Holocaust. If the question is asked, 'Where was God at Auschwitz?', Kushner's answer is that 'He was with the victims, and not with the murderers.'[67]

Many theodicies have appealed to some form of a theory of 'evil as a (regrettable) means to a greater good'. The greater good could be, for example, the formation of such higher human virtues as compassion, courage, and generosity that might have little occasion to arise except in the face of suffering, injustice, and evil. As John Hick has put it, from this perspective the world is not seen as being designed for the '… maximization of human pleasure and the minimization of human pain', but rather adapted to '… the quite different purpose of "soul making"'.[68] The existence of evil, then, is seen as a necessary means in the moral development of the human race.

Various writers on the Holocaust have pointed out that the emergence of the state of Israel and the world's greater sensitivity to the evils of anti-Semitism are goods that have emerged from the massive evil of the Holocaust. While such observations may be true, critics are quick to raise the questions, 'Wasn't the Holocaust too high a price to pay for such goods? How can you say that the good outweighed the evil? And good *for whom* ? What about the 'good' of the victims? Should not God have chosen better and more just means to accomplish whatever good might have been in view?'

64 John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* p. 39.
65 Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), p. 82.
66 Kushner, *Bad Things*, p.84.
67 Kushner, *When Bad Things*
68 Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* p. 42.

Such questions cannot be easily dismissed. As Dan Cohn-Sherbok has pointed out, theodicies that discuss the Holocaust without having appeal to a doctrine of a future life and the possibility of compensation for the innocent have no adequate way of maintaining the justice of God.[69]

In defence of the 'greater good' type of theodicy, it could be noted that the critics have their own set of questions to ponder: 'If you say that God should have stopped Hitler, how about Mussolini? If Mussolini, then how about Pearl Harbour … If God should have intervened to stop the slaughter of six million, how about five? Four? 400,000? 40,000? 4,000? 400? 40? 4? On what basis can you say that 'X amount of evil' is inconsistent with the ultimate purposes of God? How can you know that precise quantity 'X'? Do you fully understand the universe that God has created or the eternal purposes of God?'

If in fact there are *independent reasons* for believing in the existence of God, considerations, for example, of design in the universe, the resurrection of Jesus, religious experience, and so forth—then these grounds still remain on the 'evidential table', so to speak, despite the fact of the Holocaust. If in fact there are independent grounds for believing in such a God as attested in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, then it will be the case that humans, from their finite and limited perspectives, are not able to set *a priori* limits on the amount of evil that could be consistent with the final purposes of an infinite God—purposes which transcend this life and the present universe as we know it.

'Limited God': Kushner and Boyd

Yet another approach to the problem of evil in general that has been gaining some ground in recent years could be termed 'Limited God' theodicies, i.e., an understanding of God in which either God's power or knowledge, or both power and knowledge are limited. Examples of such theodicies can be find in a Jewish writer such as Harold Kushner, in process theology[70], and in the movement somewhat influenced by process thought known as 'Open theism'.[71] Such approaches purport to take human freedom very seriously and consistently, and argue that God, in order to 'make space' for human freedom, an essential defining characteristic of human persons, voluntarily limits his power, knowledge, or both. God cannot be blamed for evil, for God

69 Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust'.

70 Most notably expounded by David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: a Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).

71 See, for example, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994); Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001); for an incisive crtique of the 'Open theism' position see Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).

is simply not able to prevent all evils without undermining the integrity of free human choices.

Harold Kushner, for example, writes that while God wants the righteous to live peaceful and happy lives, '… sometimes even He can't bring that about. It is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims.'[72] Even if God is a just God, but not a God who has all power, '… then He can still be on our side when bad things happen to us'.[73]

Gregory Boyd, an exponent of 'Open Theism,' in which God's knowledge of the future is limited by free human choices, proposes a 'Trinitarian warfare theodicy' as a response to the problem of evil. God's will is not the immediate explanation for a massive evil like the Holocaust; world history is the story of innumerable acts of evil perpetrated by both human and supernatural agents, who are at war with the purposes of God. Hitler, not God, is to be blamed for the Holocaust; and not just Hitler but the myriads of others who cooperated actively or passively in Hitler's genocidal acts.[74] God values freedom and the genuine love of his creatures so much that he is willing to take the enormous risks of massive evil in order to achieve his final purposes.

These 'limited God' theodicies have some appeal, in that they would purportedly let God 'off the hook' for massive evil. God can not be blamed for the Holocaust if God, for whatever reasons, could not have prevented the Holocaust. Open Theists and process theologians claim to present a picture of a 'religiously available' God who can sympathize and identify with the victims of suffering and injustice. Nevertheless, from the perspective of Evangelical theology, for which the biblical witness is normative, such approaches can be seen as seriously if not fatally flawed.

It is difficult to square the notion of a God of limited power with the biblical witness to the all-powerful 'Maker of Heaven and Earth'. It could be noted at the outset that the history of modern theology would suggest that displacing the primacy of biblical authority in *theology* makes it more difficult to maintain the primacy of biblical authority in *ethics;* 'slippery slopes' in doctrinal foundations have tended to produce slippery slopes in morals.

And just how is one to determine *exactly how limited* is the power of God? Limited enough to 'make space for human freedom', but still powerful enough to raise the dead? Does it make sense to say that a God powerful enough to raise the dead and overcome the Second Law of Thermodynamics has *limited* power? On the other hand, if God does not have the power to raise the dead, then how can either the *compensatory* or *retributive* justice of God be vindicated in the world to come? Without a hope in the resurrection, and the retributive justice of God, is it the case that Adolf Hitler, by committing suicide in a Berlin bunker in April 1945 and having his body cremated, has escaped all human and even divine justice?

How much power must God still have to ensure the classic Christian

72 Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen*, p. 43.
73 Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen,* p. 44
74 Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil,* p. 174.

and Jewish hope that God will ultimately prevail against evil? If God's power is very great, but finite, and the power of evil, while finite, grows exponentially over time, then on what basis is it certain that God will prevail over evil, or that the total amount of good will outweigh evil at the end?

Even as a limited-God theodicy puts into question the possibility that the justice of God will be finally vindicated, so it would appear to raise questions about the *wisdom* of God as well. Should God have taken the risk of creating the world in the first place, if his knowledge and power were limited to the extent that there was no assurance that good would finally outweigh the evils? Would not a wise and prudent God have better abstained from creating the universe at all, rather that creating a 'fiasco' in which God's intentions for goodness and justice were mocked with no prospect of final redemption? These problems concerning the power, wisdom, and justice of God in relation to the clear biblical witness would seem to indicate that 'limited God' theodicies create as many problems as they purport to solve.

Proposal: a Martyreo-Eschatological Hermeneutic

Having surveyed a range of Jewish and Christian responses to the Holocaust, an attempt will now be made to sketch the outlines of what might be called a 'martyreo-eschatalogical' hermeneutic of the Holocaust. It will be suggested that the categories of *martyrdom* and *eschatology* are appropriate and even essential for any discussions of theodicy in relation to this subject.

The category of martyrdom is, of course, a venerable one in both the Jewish and Christian traditions.[75] Jewish writers have not been in agreement about the helpfulness of this concept in relation to the Holocaust. Emil Fackenheim, for example, has questioned its viability. In the post-Holocaust situation, Fackenheim believes, it is time '…to suspend the time-honored Jewish exaltation of martyrdom … after Auschwitz, Jewish life is more sacred than Jewish death, were it even for the sanctification of the divine Name'.[76] The supreme value for the Jew is the continuation of Jewish *existence,* and this is demonstrated in unwavering commitment to the state of Israel and Jewish self-defence—lest 'Hitler be given posthumous victories'. In Fackenheim's view, the dehumanization of so many in the death camps, that reduced human beings to the living dead, removed the real possibility of ethical choice presupposed by the traditional understandings of martyrdom.

The Orthodox writer Eliezer Berkovits has, however, defended the traditional Jewish notion of *Kiddush haShem* ('sanctification of the divine Name'—in martyrdom) as very relevant to the death camps and the ghettoes. Though the faith of many failed or was non-existent, there were tens of

75 A notable example from the intertestamental period is the account of the Jewish mother who though she saw her seven sons tortured and killed during the persecution of Antiochus IV, yet 'bore it with good courage because of her hope in the Lord' and faith in the resurrection: II Macc. 7.

76 Emil Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), p. 87.

thousands who went to the ovens in the death camps with the name of God on their lips, saying the *Shema* in the same courageous way as did Rabbi Akiba before being martyred by the Romans during the time of Hadrian.[77] Such a 'sanctification of the Name' is not just one final act of affirmation in the face of death, but can be a form of behaviour and daily conduct. Continuing with the routine of daily prayers, even under the most degrading of circumstances, '… and ignoring the world that is bent on crushing the Jew is one of the marks of *Kiddush haShem.*'[78]

The perspective being argued here is more in keeping with that of Berkovits than Fackenheim. While Fackenheim may be strictly correct in saying that many Holocaust victims were so dehumanized that meaningful ethical choices of a heroic sort were no longer a realistic psychological possibility, could one not still appeal to a notion of the solidarity of the Jewish people, and say that one (heroic Jewish martyr) died for the many? A traditional Jewish reading of Isaiah 53 would see the Suffering Servant who was 'led like a lamb to the slaughter' and whose form was 'marred beyond human likeness', to be a figure of the Jewish people as a whole, who have been called by God to suffer for the Name over the many centuries of history. A Jew, even a non-religious Jew, who was murdered merely *for being a Jew*, the bearer of a name associated with the God of Abraham, could thus, in an extended sense, be viewed as a martyr. 'Jew-hatred is God-hatred': antisemitism is a *theological* phenomenon, in that hatred of the chosen race is in the final analysis hatred directed against God himself.

For the Christian, viewing the Holocaust through the lens of a category such as martyrdom would help to rescue the Christian tradition from its tragic legacy of anti-Judaism and its tendency to see post-biblical Jewish history through the grid of a theology of 'divine punishment of the Jewish people'. Reflection on the reality of martyrdom would honour the lives of the Jews who died under Hitler, and help to retrieve for American Christians living in the affluent and comfortable West a noble category in their own Christian tradition. The experience of Jewish martyrs during the Nazi years should offer a grim reminder to Western Christians to reflect on the fact that in the last one hundred years, *more Christians* lost their lives as martyrs than in all the previous centuries combined.[79] The memory of the Holocaust

77 Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust*, p. 82.
78 Berkovits, *Faith*, p. 83. Victor Frankel, himself a Holocaust survivor, has written: 'The experience of camp life shows that man does have a choice of action. There were enough examples, often of a heroic nature, which proved that apathy could be overcome, irritability suppressed. Man *can* preserve a vestige of spiritual freedom, of independence of mind, even in such terrible conditions of psychic and physical stress.' *From Death Camp to Existentialism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 65.

79 Todd M. Johnson, 'Global Christianity at 2000', *Contact* 33:2 (Summer 2003), p.15. Most of these Christian martyrs died under Communist regimes, but even after the collapse of communism, Christians were being persecuted by secular, Islamic, Hindu, and even 'Christian' regimes.

summons both Jews and Christians to be willing to live and if necessary die for the 'sanctification of the Name'.

'Eschatological Intensification of Evil':

The hermeneutical approach being presented here is 'eschatological' in three respects, in that it posits first the eschatological *intensification* of evil, then the eschatological *vindication* of divine justice in the punishment of evil, and finally the eschatological *transvaluation* of evil and suffering in the New Creation. This hermeneutic presupposes that reflection on the Holocaust must incorporate a perspective that looks toward the end of history, and beyond history to the new creation and the world to come.

With respect to the first point above, it can be noted that both Jewish and Christian tradition expect an intensification of evil and growing persecution of the righteous as history approaches the end. The prophet Ezekiel speaks of the enemies of God and God's people under the mysterious figure of Gog and Magog (Ezk.38, 39) who attempt to destroy the people of Israel in the time of the end. The prophecy of Daniel foresees the rise of a wicked ruler who 'exalts and magnifies himself above every god', who 'honours a god of fortresses', and who brings unparalleled distress upon God's people (Dan.11:36-39; 12:1,2).

In rabbinic literature, the coming of the messiah is heralded by a time in which 'presumption will increase.., the empire shall fall into heresy … Galilee will be laid waste … and the people … shall go about from city to city with none to show pity on them.'[80] In the Talmud it is stated, 'When you see a generation ever dwindling, hope for him [the Messiah] … R. Johanan said: When you see a generation overwhelmed by troubles as by a river, await him, as it is written, *when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him* [Is.59:19 ?], which is followed by, *And the Redeemer shall come to Zion* [Is.59:20].'[81]

Christian apocalyptic teaching also expects growing persecution of the people of God as the time of the end draws near. The coming of the Son of Man will be preceded, according to Jesus, by a time of great distress, 'unequalled from the beginning of the world until now, and never to be equalled again' (Mt. 24:21-27). The apostle Paul expected the appearance of a 'man of lawlessness' who would 'oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God', whose coming would be in 'accordance with the working of Satan' (2 Thess. 2:3-9).[82] The John of Revelation has a vision of believers who have '… come out of the great tribulation' and who as martyrs have 'washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 7:14). This is not to say that Hitler and the Holocaust are to simply be identified with the 'Antichrist' and

80 Mishnah *Sotah* 9:15.

81 BT *Sanhedrin* 98a.

82 It is recognized that both these passages—Matt. 24 and 2 Thess. 2—raise a variety of complex exegetical questions; however, they are cited here only in relation to the more limited point that the tradition expects an intensification of evil prior to the end.

'Great Tribulation,' but from the perspective being suggested here, it would seem consistent to see the Holocaust as an *anticipation* of the end and an example of the *intensification* of evil as history approaches its climax.

Many have seen in Hitler not merely a human 'evil genius', but an evil leader energized by a demonic power. His ability to commit evil was amplified and intensified by the modern technology of a totalitarian state, a technology of death not available to tyrants in earlier periods of history.[83]

Secular history during the last hundred years would, in fact, seem to be consistent with the pattern suggested here. The twentieth century has been called the 'century of mass murder' and genocide, with an estimated 60 million people being killed in civil wars, disturbances and genocides. This tragic record of massive brutality and killing includes the Holocaust; the brutal assault on the Armenians by the Turks, 1915-1923; Stalin's planned famine in the Ukraine, starving millions during the period 1932-33; some 3 million executed under Mao Tse-tung; massacres in Indonesia, 1965-66; mass killings in Bangladesh (1971), Burundi (1972), Cambodia (1975-79), East Timor (1975-79), Rwanda (1994); and the devastations in the former Yugoslavia, the Congo, and Chechnya.[84] And as already noted above, it should be recalled that *more Christians* were killed for their faith in the twentieth century than in all the previous centuries combined.[85]

Eschatology and Divine Justice:

A second element in the proposal being offered here involves the *eschatological vindication of divine justice.* That is to say, any viable theodicy that attempted to deal with the Holocaust would involve God's action not only during history, but beyond history, in the life to come. Such a theodicy would incorporate the categories of *resurrection* and *judgment,* in order to provide a conceptual apparatus for maintaining both the *compensatory* and *retributive* justice of God.

Dan Cohn-Sherbok has noted the limitations of Jewish discussions such as those of Fackenheim and Rubenstein in this regard, where no appeal to the afterlife is made. 'If the Jewish faith is to survive', in his view, 'Holocaust theology will need to incorporate a belief in the Afterlife in which the righteous of Israel who died in the death camps will receive their due reward.'[86] He notes that many modern Jewish thinkers have abandoned the tradi-

83 This point was made by Albert Speer, Hitler's Minister of Armaments and War Production: 'The criminal events of those years were not only the outgrowth of Hitler's personality. The extent of the crimes was also due to the fact that Hitler was the first to be able to employ the implements of technology to multiply crimes.' Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich: Memoirs* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 615.

84 James E. Waller, 'Human Nature and Genocide,' *Stillpoint* 18:3 (Summer 2003): 11-13 at 11; drawing from Waller's book, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

85 Note 77 above.

86 Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust,' p. 277.

tional categories of the resurrection of the dead, the coming of a messianic age, and divine judgment in the world to come, and consequently have no convincing way of conceptualizing how the justice of God could be maintained. 'Without the eventual vindication of the righteous in Paradise', he argued, 'there is no way to sustain the belief in the providential God who watches over His chosen people.'[87]

An Evangelical theodicy can be in agreement with Cohn-Sherbok on this crucial point. If the God of history acts beyond history in raising the dead and in punishing the wicked, then there is a way of understanding how the justice of God could be vindicated, despite the atrocities of the Holocaust. The God who raises the dead can compensate righteous victims for the injustices they have suffered, and visit retribution on those who perpetrated the atrocities.[88] If God indeed can raise the dead, an Adolf Hitler who committed suicide and had his body cremated to escape human justice can still be called to account by the Righteous Judge who raises the dead and is the almighty Maker of Heaven and Earth.

Holocaust and Eternal Salvation?

It must be recognized, of course, that an evangelical theodicy for the Holocaust faces an issue not faced in the same way by Cohn-Sherbok, i.e., the category of 'righteous victim' in relation to the question of *eternal salvation.* Would it not be the case, given the doctrines of original sin and the necessity of faith in Christ for salvation, that the category of '[eternally]righteous [non-believing Jewish] victims' of the Holocaust be an 'empty set'?

In attempting to respond to this important point, it may be admitted at the outset that any suggestion on this matter is in the nature of the case speculative. Nevertheless, it could be suggested that an evangelical theodicy would hold that a) any person who is ultimately and eternally redeemed is so redeemed only on the basis of the merits of Christ; b) that we can form (fallible) human judgments as to any person's eternal destiny only on the basis of their *response* to Christ and the gospel; and c) that while it is *conceptually* and *hypothetically* possible that an individual might be *ontically* in a state of salvation without that individual or others being *epistemically aware* of that state of salvation, we cannot claim to *know* that such a state of salvation actually exists for a given individual, apart from their actual response to Christ and the gospel.[89]

87 Dan Cohn-Sherbok, 'Jewish Faith and the Holocaust', p. 292.

88 In their revisionist, post-Holocaust theology, Roy and Alice Eckardt reject the historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus, which they see as the legitimation of 'Christian triumphalism and supersessionism'; Jesus will be raised at the end of history—together with the victims of the Holocaust: *Long Night's Journey into Day* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), pp. 132, 150.

89 Compare the statement in Article IV.23 of the 1989 'Willowbank Declaration on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People': 'We deny that we have *sufficient warrant* [emphasis added:JD] to assume or anticipate the salvation of anyone, who is not a believer in Jesus Christ.'

The upshot of this line of reasoning is that it is, in fact, possible, within the parameters of traditional evangelical doctrine, to *conceptualize* the post-mortem 'compensation' of a righteous (Jewish) Holocaust victim—and even their eternal salvation[90]—while admitting that it is not possible to know that such is actually the case. Nevertheless, such a line of reasoning is far from being devoid of merit, in that it at least *in principle* provides a way for understanding how the justice of God and the dignity and rights of the victims could be vindicated in a future state.

At this point a further word might be said concerning perhaps the 'hardest of the hard cases': the babies who were murdered and burned in the ovens of the death camps. The grim challenge of Irving Greenberg should be recalled: 'No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children.'[91] No theodicy attempting to reflect on the horrors of the Holocaust can avoid this challenge. Does Greenberg meet his own challenge, neglecting, as he does, to appeal to a faith in the resurrection and the reality of a world to come? Is it not at least possible to *conceptualize* a future state of affairs in which such victims could be compensated, if a righteous God does indeed raise the dead?

And to move even a step further, what if the position of Charles Hodge on the matter of infants dying in infancy—*that all who die in infancy are saved*—turned out to be correct? Hodge, writing in the nineteenth century, did not, of course have the Holocaust in view, but rather the common circumstance of high infant mortality in his own historical era. Appealing to Romans 5:18, 19 ('by the obedience of the one man many will be made righteous'), Hodge argued that the scriptures nowhere exclude any class of infants, believing or unbelieving, from the benefits of Christ's redemption; 'all the descendants of Adam, except those of whom it is expressly revealed that they cannot inherit the kingdom of God, are saved.'[92] Hodge was arguing that all infants dying in infancy are *presumptively elect* and saved through the merits of Christ and the sovereign decree of God. If Hodge were correct, then this speaks directly to Greenberg's challenge. It may not be possible to *know* that Hodge's position is correct, but even the possibility that it *may* be correct is significant for a Holocaust theodicy.

The Eschatological 'Transvaluation' of Suffering:

A final element in the perspective being offered here might be termed the 'eschatological *transvaluation* of evil and suffering'. This notion is suggested in the statement of the apostle

90 One might posit, hypothetically to be sure, a 'secret work of the Spirit' and a 'seed of faith' in such cases, known to God alone.

91 Cited in notes 28, 31 above.

92 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology,* v.I ((Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, repr. 1975), p. 26. On the issue of infant salvation, see also the study of R.A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907), written in the context of a controversy on this topic in the Southern Presbyterian Church.

Paul, 'I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us' (Rom. 8:18).[93] The (merely) temporal (or, eternal) perspective within which the suffering is viewed is crucial for a person's valuation of the suffering. The apostle is not denying the reality or intensity of his own or anyone else's suffering; only affirming, from the perspective of faith and eternity, that such suffering can be seen as 'transvalued' from that eternal, eschatological perspective. The *fact* of pain remains; the *meaning* of pain can be transformed if it can be viewed from a longer, wider, and even eternal perspective within which at least the *possibility* of some meaning is held open.

The transvaluation of the 'present suffering' is not dependent on a full or even partial understanding of the 'reasons' for the suffering; it may be sufficient from the perspective of faith to have some grounds to believe that it is *possible* that God has reasons for permitting the suffering, even when I cannot imagine what those specific reasons might be. The categories of *martyrdom* and the vindication of divine justice in resurrection, divine judgment, and life in the world to come at least provide a theological framework within which the sufferings and atrocities of the death camps could be transvalued.

Viewing the matter from the perspective of a purely utilitarian calculus of the balance of pain and pleasure,[94] the question could be raised, 'Is it possible that any finite amount of suffering, however great or intense, could, in principle, be "counter-balanced" by an eternal, unending experience of pleasure and satisfaction in some future state? Would it be better not to have existed at all, rather than have existed, suffered terribly, and then experienced intense, never-ending satisfactions in a life to come?'

It at least seems plausible that the latter, 'counter-balancing' scenario could be reasonably preferred by a moral agent who was given the choice. In a more this-worldly context, a woman's experience of labor and childbirth might be invoked as an analogy. Labour and childbirth can be one of the most physically painful human experiences; yet countless women have said 'It was worth it', when the pain was recalled after the fact, and from the perspective of the satisfactions experienced as the mother of the child. The pain had been 'transvalued'.[95] It makes all the difference in the world as to

93 Similarly, the apostle writes in 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all.' This is not to say that any given sufffering—whether Paul's or that of someone in a death camp—is in itself 'light and momentary'; only, that *from the perspective of a future life* it could be seen as such.

94 It is not being argued here that such a utilitarian perspective is adequate theologically for wrestling with the theodicy question; only that it might be one element among many in the overall discussion.

95 Jesus uses precisely such an illustration in John 16:21 to put the disciples' grief at his departure in a larger context: 'A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child has been born into the world.'

whether the pain in question is seen as ultimately pointless, meaningless, and unredeemable, or on the other hand, as possibly the 'birthpangs' of the messianic age or a prelude to the 'glory that will be revealed in us' in the new creation that is to come.

Reflections from the Book of Job: 'Randomness' in History

This section's discussion of theodicy will be concluded with several observations on the book of Job, the biblical book which perhaps more than any other, inevitably arises in both Jewish and Christian reflections on the Holocaust.[96] It is worth noting that the figure of *Satan* is prominent in the opening narrative. Job's inexplicable and seemingly gratuitous suffering has causes that cannot be fully understood in this-worldly terms alone; Job has been caught in a cosmic battle, a spiritual warfare between the forces of good and evil. In the eschatalogical hermeneutic offered here, there is a place for a *demonic* element in human history, and furthermore, a way of understanding how such a demonic dimension could intensify as history approaches the end. From such a perspective, the demonic dimensions of Hitler's genocidal project could be viewed as an anticipation of the eschatological intensification of evil that has been recognized in both Jewish and Christian tradition.

Satan's question, 'Does Job fear God for nothing?' could be seen as raising the issue of *self-centred religion.* Satan accuses Job of serving God for essentially self-serving reasons. Will Job really continue to love and serve God if all worldly inducements and rewards are taken away?[97] Biblical religion can be seen as providing a philosophy of history in which both *regularity* and *randomness* are built into the historical process.

God's covenant with creation ensures that 'seedtime and harvest' and the forces of nature will exhibit a certain order and predictability (cf. Gen.8:22). At the same time, the biblical writers can recognize the apparently random and gratuitous nature of human life: the race is not necessarily to the swift or the battle to the strong, 'but time and chance happen to them all' (Ecc.9:11). The virtuous are not guaranteed a normal lifespan or a fitting reward *in this life* for their righteousness; the pious and the unbeliever alike were consumed in the flames of Auschwitz.

And yet it is precisely this random element of human experience that can be seen to be a way of answering

96 Among the many commentaries on Job, see: Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job,* tr. Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); John Calvin, *Sermons on Job,* tr. Arthur Golding (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1993) [facsimile of 1574 ed.]; Saadiah Ben Joseph Al-Fayyumi, *The Book of Theodicy,* tr. L.E. Goodman (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988); Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987). I wish to thank my colleague Paul Lim for drawing my attention to these references.

97 Saadiah, op. cit., p. 383 notes that God does not respond by promising Job a recompense for his suffering, even though this is later the case: this is consistent with a divine testing of the sincerity and disinterestedness of Job's faith.

Satan's question: 'Is all human religion at heart self-interest? Must God inevitably fail in his project of producing a people who will love God *for God's own sake*—in spite of gratuitous and inexplicable evil?' If the righteous—whether believing Jew or believing Gentile—were always rewarded in this life for their righteousness, humans might never advance to a state of disinterested love for God, loving God for God's own sake.[98]

From such a perspective, the presence of random and gratuitous evil in history can be seen as an essential 'filter' to purify man from his inveterate bent to serve the Creator for selfish reasons. As such, this 'random filter' in history can be accommodated within the framework of 'greater good' theodicies.

Admittedly, this paper, for some readers, may have raised as many questions as it has answered. It is hoped, however, that by emphasizing the concepts of the eschatological intensification of evil, the special role of Israel in God's plan as witnesses to the covenant with Abraham, and the apparently 'random' and inexplicable elements in the sovereign God's plan for history, future evangelical reflections on the Holocaust will not be limited merely to 'divine retribution' understandings of the theodicy question.

98 This hypothesis of random, gratuitous evil as a 'filter' on selfish religion has some similarity to the perspective of Moses ben Hayyim Alsheikh (c.1508-1600), a Jewish commentator on Job: Only an apparent 'disconnect' between human action and Divine response can be the background for a truly selfless faith: see Nahum Glatzer, *Essays in Jewish Thought* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1978), 'The Book of Job and Its Interpreters,' pp.109-134 at p. 126.