Facing the Challenges of the Holocaust

"Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of children, whose bodies I saw turned to wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never."


The Holocaust, a term taken from the burnt sacrifice that was offered in the temple and that was totally consumed, refers to the systematic slaughter of six million Jews by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis during the period of World War II. Jews at times refer to it as the shoah, meaning “terrible catastrophe.”

Until recently, there was widespread ignorance and misunderstanding among Americans about the Holocaust. Studies reveal that even those school children who were familiar with the term often were unaware of what it referred to. Some even believed it to be a Jewish holiday! Today this is no longer the case. There is now greater awareness than ever before of the events surrounding the Holocaust. This, however, has created a new set of problems. For perhaps too much is now being said that is either inaccurate or that trivializes the subject and takes away from the horror of that event. Indeed, there are those who invoke the Holocaust too frequently and those who do not talk of it enough; those who speak of it appropriately and those who do so insensitively; those who wish to forget about the past and those who seek to learn from it; those who use the Holocaust to their own advantage and those who are humbled by its magnitude and awesomeness.

According to the Torah, when Moses approached the burning bush, God said to him, “Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Exod. 3:5). To speak of the Holocaust is to tread on terra sancta, holy ground. Indeed, the blood of its victims has barely congealed; its voice still “is crying to me [God] from the ground” (Gen. 4:10). Survivors with concentration camp numbers tattooed on their forearms bear witness to the power of the demonic, as well as to the resilience of the human spirit. There is a difference, of course, between the biblical story of Moses at the bush and that of the Holocaust. In the former, the bush burned but was not consumed. In the latter, six million Jewish men, women, and children burned; and their bodies were consumed—although not entirely so. The Jewish people continue to live! By their very survival they bear testimony to the world that good ultimately triumphs over evil; by their very tortured death they give witness that the Messiah has not yet come; and by their continued faithfulness to God’s covenant, they still declare, like Job long ago, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (13:15, KJV).

All Jews alive today regard themselves as Holocaust survivors since Hitler’s plan was genocidal—to eradicate the entire Jewish nation. All bear the awesome responsibility of telling the story of those excruciating years. Nevertheless, the morally sensitive person trembles in awe and trepidation before uttering anything at all about the Nazi confagration. Just as Aaron, the high priest, was so stunned by the death of his two sons that he could nor speak (see Lev. 10:1-3, so our initial response to the Holocaust must be one of silence. We ought to feel dumbstruck by the magnitude of suffering and enormity of manifest evil. Even the survivors themselves were incapable of speaking of their experiences for many years.

We are faced, therefore, with an incredible dilemma. To speak of the Holocaust is to risk the inevitability that our words will be inadequate to the task and responsibility at hand. To remain silent, on the other hand, is to assume the even greater risk that the Holocaust might be forgotten and that such monumental evil and human anguish might Occur again. As Santayana has warned, those who do not learn from the errors of history are doomed to repeat them. The only solution is to commemorate the Holocaust through both silence and words. Only after mourning our terrible loss may we dare speak of it; only after initially remaining silent do we have the moral right to talk of it.

In learning about the Holocaust one immediately finds that, unlike most other subjects, it can never be fully mastered, grasped, or understood. The more it is studied, the more it eludes our grasp, and the more beguiling and incomprehensible it becomes. It forever remains a profound mystery to theologians, social scientists, and survivors alike. The thoughtful student feels humbled by the Holocaust.
And yet, he refuses to view it detached from its core as a historical event involving human misery and suffering of incredible magnitude. In speaking of the theological lessons or social implications to be drawn from it, he is mindful that what is being spoken of, first and foremost, is an actual historical event in which real, live children and adults suffered excruciating pain, unmitigated suffering, and horrible deaths.

The question of whether the Holocaust actually constitutes a qualitatively different form of evil from anything ever experienced before by humanity, or whether it only differs in its staggering proportions, has been debated for some time. There are those who believe that the Holocaust was a unique episode in the annals of history, one in which evil reached a qualitatively new level never before attained. "The uniqueness of the position of the Jews in the Nazi world," writes Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer, "was that they had been singled out for the total destruction ... simply because they had been born of three Jewish grandparents. In other words, for the first time in history a sentence of death had been pronounced on anyone guilty of having been born, and born of certain parents... Others maintain that while it was quantitatively more tragic than other instances of evil or Jewish suffering, it was not qualitatively different. As theologian David Hartman wrote, "It is childish and often vulgar to attempt to demonstrate how the Jewish people's suffering is unique in history. The Holocaust, this position would claim, is no more theologically perplexing or incomprehensible, and no less compelling, than the tragic, premature death of even a single child."

In whichever manner the student of the Holocaust approaches the subject, however, he ought to remember that just as the Torah prohibits us from uttering God's name in vain lest we trivialize it, so we dare not invoke the Holocaust gratuitously, callously, glibly, or inappropriately.

Although the Holocaust has a strong universal component, it should not be universalized to the point where its particularly is lost. Certainly, millions of Gentiles whose lives were equal in value to those of Jewish victims died at the hands of the Nazis.

No attempt should be made to rob their deaths of meaning or to minimize the significance of their wimess. And yet, the slaughter of the Jews was, somehow, radically different. Whether they were young or old, religious or irreligious; whether they were actively opposed to Nazism or silent in the face of it; even if they were converted Christians with but three Jewish grandparents-what mattered was the fact that they had "Jewish blood" in them. That alone made them subject to extermination. The Nazi aim was to purify and cleanse society of Jews, to bring about a "final solution" to what was perceived to be the Jewish problem. Jews were regarded as vermin contaminating the Aryan race and poisoning German society. Every single one of them had to be hunted down and annihilated.

The Holocaust raises many questions among people of faith and countless challenges to both Christians and Jews. We will explore a few of those issues.

**Challenges to Christian and Jewish Faiths**

I die peacefully, but not complacently; persecuted but not enslaved; embittered but not cynical; a believer but not a supplicant; a lover of God but no blind amensayer of His.

I have followed Him even when He rejected me. I have followed His commandments even when He has castigated me for it; I have loved Him and I love Him even when He hurls me to the earth, tortures me to death, makes me the object of shame and ridicule... God of Israel... You have done everything to make me stop believing in You. Now lest it seem to You that You will succeed by these tribulations to drive me from the right path, I notify You, my God and God of my fathers that It will not avail You in the least! You may insult me. You may castigate me. You may take from me all that I cherish and hold dear in the world. You may torture me to death-I shall believe in You, I shall love You no matter what You do to test me!

And these are my last words to You, my wrathful God: nothing will avail You in the least. You have done everything to make me renounce You, to make me lose faith in You, but I die exactly as I have lived, a believer!

Hear, 0 Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. Into your hands, 0 Lord, I consign my soul.'

The Holocaust poses a number of serious challenges to traditional Christian and Jewish theologies. Some of the most sacrosanct affirmations of both faiths are brought into radical questioning by those who have genuinely confronted the Holocaust. Is it possible, for example, for Christians and Jews to speak of God in the post-Auschwitz era in the same way that they did before? Can they ever again
have perfect faith in a loving and caring God, or rather, as theologian Irving Greenberg has suggested, are only "moments of faith" now possible? Can they speak as they did earlier of God's love and concern for man and the world, and his guidance of the course of history while bearing witness to events reflecting the utter absence of such love, guidance, and concern? Can they continue to profess doctrines such as the covenant, choseness, and divine providence? Can Judaism any longer affirm the doctrine of the inherent purity and goodness of man in the face of his manifest depravity? Is it still possible for Christians and Jews to believe in a God who is omniscient and omnipotent in light of his deafening silence? Can they speak of God's miraculous presence in 1948 when the State of Israel was born at the same time that they speak of his absence in Europe between 1938 and 1945? Does God indiscriminately play peekaboo with man, sometimes here, sometimes not? Does he close his eyes to the world? Does he guide events? Can God stand up to the burdens of history? Can man?

No matter how we may wok out these and other such vexing theological problems, one thing is clear—neither Christians nor Jews can ever be quite the same after Auschwitz as they were before. And neither can their faiths. Confronting the Holocaust admittedly involves great risk in that it forces the morally sensitive individual to reevaluate, and perhaps even alter, aspects of his or her most treasured values and sacrosanct religious convictions.

To confront the Holocaust is to begin a process of reflection and reappraisal without knowing where it will lead ultimately. And yet, the devout person of faith feels compelled to embark on such a path, for he deeply believes in God and trusts that his divine goodness and grace can withstand such questioning. Such a person is not afraid to confront the burdens of history, even those of the Holocaust, for he is confident that his God can withstand the challenge and that his faith can be sustained despite his encountering such events. Like Abraham, whose deep, abiding trust in God prompted him to leave the security of his home and to go to an unknown land to which God promised to lead him, so those who confront the Holocaust today must be prepared to abandon the security and smugness of their lives of faith and to struggle trustingly toward a new stage of belief.

To confront the Holocaust genuinely is to open ourselves up to the inescapable, painful questions and anguishing challenges it poses. We cannot but face history, however, and we cannot but attempt to reconcile both God and man with its burdens. For only those who are willing to risk such insecurities can ever hope to become disciples of Father Abraham and a source of blessing to "all the families of the earth." Only those who struggle with God and with man can merit the title "Israel," for they have "striven with God and with men, and have prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

Intelligibility of Suffering

Women carrying children were [always] sent with them to the crematorium. Children were of no labor value so they were killed... When the extermination of the Jews in the gas chambers was at its height, orders were issued that children were to be thrown straight into the crematorium furnace, or into a pit near the crematorium, without being gassed first.

Jewish tradition is replete with sources indicating that suffering comes as a consequence of sin. The Torah, for example, posits this correlation on a number of occasions (see Deut. 8: 19-20, 28: 15-68), as do the prophets who often admonish Israel, warning her either to repent or to suffer a punishment (see Jer. 16:10-13; 22:8-9).

The rabbis in the talmudic period also accepted the cause-and-effect nexus between sin and suffering. They offered a variety of sins as explanations for the Jewish condition of exile and for the destruction of Jerusalem. One rabbinic view attributed the destruction of the first Jerusalem temple (586 B.C.E.) to the sins of murder, sexual licentiousness, robbery, and idol worship, and the destruction of the second temple (70 C.E.) to the sin of fratricide.

Another view maintained that the second temple was destroyed because the Jews did not bless the Torah before studying it. In other words, although they studied Torah, they did so more for its historical and ethical content than because they acknowledged it as the Word of God.

There is even a view that "Jerusalem was destroyed because the children did not attend school and instead loitered in the streets" (B.T., Shabo 119b). It is clear that for centuries Jews have believed that their suffering was neither haphazard nor coincidental, but was deliberately inflicted upon them by God as a consequence of their sins. The rabbis offered a variety of other explanations for Jewish suffering in general. In one instance they suggested that it comes, paradoxically, as a result of their belovedness in the eyes of God, as reflected in Amos's statement, "You only have known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). According to this view, God is more demanding of Israel and exacting in his relationship with her than he is with the other nations of the world, who could not withstand a relationship guided by justice and who, unlike Israel, are in need of divine mercy...
Another rabbinic rationale for Israel’s suffering is that God’s love and mercy for the Jewish people is so great that he chooses to punish them immediately for their sins instead of letting the sins accumulate over generations. That way, God is not forced into punishing them all at once, in a measure they could not bear. The sins of other nations, however, are not punished immediately but are allowed to accumulate until they become so numerous that the nations cannot withstand the overwhelming severity of the punishment.

A further explanation is that just as righteous individuals are punished for their sins in this world but receive their just rewards in the next, so Israel as a whole will be amply rewarded in the next world, even though she may suffer in this earthly one.

In whatever manner the rabbis rationalized Jewish suffering, there was widespread agreement that it was deserved and that it came as a punishment for sin. Nowhere is this correlation more clearly expressed than the traditional holiday liturgy, which states, Because of our sins We have been exiled from our land ...” (This Wayer Was eliminated from the Reform prayer book.)

There is an additional strain of thought, however, that rejects the connection between sin and suffering, and that suggests instead that man cannot comprehend the reason for his suffering. The theodicy problem of why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper has been raised repeatedly throughout Jewish history. When Abraham challenged God’s intentions to destroy the entire city of Sodom, the righteous along with the wicked, and asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25), in reality, say the rabbis, he was raising the theodicy problem. And when Moses asked to see the fullness of God’s glory (Exod. 33:18), he was really asking the rabbis claim, to learn the answer to that same profound mystery.

God responded, however, by telling Moses that he would show him only his back, symbolizing that mortal man will never fully comprehend God’s immutable ways. It was this idea that, in fact, prompted one talmudic rabbi to suggest that Moses was the author of the biblical Book of Job.

The entire Scroll of Job is devoted to the theme of suffering, and more particularly, to the classical theodicy problem. The story is a familiar one. Satan challenges God to take away all of Job’s possessions to prove that under such conditions Job would curse, not praise, God. God accepts the challenge, believing that whatever the circumstances, Job’s faith and devotion would remain inviolable. He proceeds to take away Job’s family, wealth, and good name. In spite of Job’s anguish and terrible losses, however, he refuses to revive God and, instead, continues to serve him righteously. Friends come to console Job throughout his ordeal, urging him to examine his deeds and to repent from his sins which were surely the root cause of his suffering. But Job refuses to accept either the rebuke of his friends or their assertion that his sins, which were few and relatively minor, warranted such severe retribution or that they were even the cause of his suffering in the first place. Finally, God himself appears, speaking from out of a whirlwind, and asks Job, a series of rhetorical questions that demonstrate man’s inability to probe the mysteries of God’s ways and Creation. Ultimately, Job is vindicated from the accusation of his friends that it was his sins that brought on his suffering. (I have often felt that it was not so much the specific content of God’s non-answer that finally brought Job solace but the fact that he heard God speaking to him and that he felt God touching his soul.)

The message of the Book of Job seems clear: the theodicy problem, and suffering in general, are humanly incomprehensible.

Man cannot penetrate the divine mystery of why humans suffer. God and humankind will always be separated by an unbridgeable gulf. As Isaiah declareit; “For my [God’s] thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD” (55:8).

There appear to be two major strains of Jewish thought on the matter of suffering—one claiming that it comes as a punishment for sin and the other, disputing any cause-and-effect connection, insisting that mortal man simply cannot ever hope to comprehend suffering, since God’s ways transcend human reason and understanding.

After the slaughter of almost two million innocent Jewish children in the Holocaust, the notion that there exists an intrinsic link between the sins of the people of Israel and their suffering, or that suffering is somehow deserved or meaningful in light of Jewish faith, has come into widespread disrepute. Jews today find it difficult, if not obscene, to profess that the suffering and death of those children was in any way a consequence of their sins. And while prayers linking suffering with sin are kept intact in the traditional Jewish prayer book, many Jews recite such prayers with great moral anguish and theological ambivalence. It has also become difficult after the Holocaust to believe in the kind of this-worldly quid pro quo scheme of reward and punishment that is described so categorically in the Bible (Deut. 11:13-21) and in the holiday Musaf service (Because of our sins we have been exiled from our land). The notion that suffering is in some way meaningful in light of our Jewish faith has become one of the foremost theological casualties of the Holocaust.
Just as the Indian caste system can lead to a fatalistic acceptance of one’s lot and as the Buddhist ethos that all of life is dukkha, or “suffering,” can lead to a negative view of man and the world, so the danger exists that if Jewish suffering were to be regarded as theologically intelligible, it might become fatalistically accepted as the natural lot of Jews. Instead, the Holocaust should jar us to the recognition that suffering is not necessarily, the mark of the Jewish condition. Neither should suffering, in fact, necessarily be the mark of the human condition as a whole. It is man who can stop it from ever occurring.

Man can even play a crucial role in mitigating natural disasters such as storms, earthquakes, floods, and famine, as well. For if man were to direct his monies and energies toward researching cures and causes instead of toward destructive or less worthy purposes, he might find a way to eliminate such ailments and disasters, too. The Talmud states that there is no ailment for which there is no cure already built into the structure of Creation, awaiting man’s discovery.

After the Holocaust we must confront ourselves not only with the question of “Where was God?” but even, more important, with the question of “Where was man?” For it was man who administered the suffering, and it was man who had the power to prevent it. The slaughter of Jews was not inevitable; their suffering was not a given; their wretched plight could have been alleviated, and indeed averted, since it was evil men who imposed it in the first place. We dare not forget that there were righteous Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews, and who demonstrated by such acts that the Jewish agony could have been mitigated, if not altogether avoided. In fact, it is those who accept suffering as the divinely predestined Jewish condition who also would be inclined to be passive and acquiescent in the face of such suffering rather than to intercede and oppose it.

Acceptance of the inevitability of Jewish suffering invariably leads to the expectation of such suffering, so that if and when it actually occurs, it is regarded as comprehensible and, indeed, a confirmation of the need for Jews to suffer. To accept Jewish suffering either as inevitable or as meaningful in light of one’s faith is to make oneself and one’s God a party to the infliction of that suffering.

Christians today should be especially wary of linking the suffering of others, particularly that of the Jews, with sinfulness, since such views have historically contributed to the infliction of such suffering. It should never be forgotten that the real sinners are those who inflict suffering upon others, not the innocent victims of it. Moreover, it is important to note the talmudic insistence that while we may attribute our own personal suffering to our sins, we may not say this about other people’s suffering (B.T., B. Metzia 5gb).

Certain Christian writers and best-selling novels speak of the creation of the State of Israel as the fulfillment of biblical prophecies signaling the imminent attack by Russia and Arab nations on Israel, which will result in a Holocaust of Jews, one even more devastating than that of World War II.

What is disturbing about such thinking is that it was a similar type of theological reasoning that entered into European consciousness centuries ago and that, many scholars would agree, ultimately contributed to the outbreak of the Holocaust. The very founders of the church implanted many of these ideas into Western civilization with devastating results. Early Christian literature and theology often found complete religious justification for, and even the necessity of, Jewish suffering by rooting such views in their interpretation of the Bible, “God’s word.” Yet, while Scripture may very well be divine and intrinsically infallible, it is man who interprets it and who can read into it all sorts of a priori viewpoints. History has demonstrated that man can justify virtually any action by abusing and manipulating, the word of God. Even religion can be transformed into an instrument for idolatry. Jews have experienced inquisitions, expulsions, forced conversions, pogroms, blood libels, and autos-da-fe at the hands of Christians who defended their actions by pointing to Scripture. Jewish suffering was comprehensible in light of the Christian faith; it was a sign of Jews’ divine accursedness for having crucified the Christians’ Lord, Jesus Christ. After all, did not the (Christian) Bible say that at the time of the Crucifixion the Jews declared, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt. 27:25)? Jews were expected to suffer. Indeed, it was Jewish suffering that shaped the theological framework within which many Christians Viewed the mystery of the continued existence of the Jewish people. After all, they reasoned, if Jews were to remain alive in this world while maintaining their ongoing testimony of their rejection of Christ, it was to be in a state of degradation so that all people would recognize the supremacy of Christianity and the triumph of the church. For centuries, the suffering, debased Jew was the only kind of Jew much Christian theology had room for.

Such theological reasoning, and particularly the dieide accusation that Jews killed Christ and were therefore to suffer eternally, contributed to a vicious cycle of violence against Jews. As the Jews increasingly suffered, the theological arguments citing their need to suffer became more meaningful and convincing. And the more suffering, humiliation, and degradation Jews were forced to endure, the more convinced their torturers became of the righteousness of their cause and of their obligation to administer even further suffering. It should be recalled that while popular images such as the “wandering” and “suffering” Jew may have been historically accurate and even
HOLOCAUST
REMEMBERANCE
DAY

theologically grounded in the Bible (see [sa. 53]), such views presuppose the existence of those who forced these conditions upon the Jews.

For a Christian to affirm today a theological paradigm that justifies Jewish suffering as a sign either of their accursedness or special chosness in the eyes of God is to set up a system that leads to the very administering of such suffering or, at best, to passivity and nonintercession in the face of it. To espouse a “theology of expectation” of further, more catastrophic Jewish suffering is to set up the dynamics that could, God forbid, serve as a catalyst to bring about such an event. In light of the Holocaust to claim that Jewish suffering is intelligible and meaningful within the Christian faith or that it somehow fulfills biblical prophecies calling for such suffering is to justify murder, blaspheme God, and pervert his sacred word. To espouse a theology that even indirectly leads either to the administering of suffering or to passivity and acquiescence in the face of it is to implicate God himself in the crucifixion of man millions of times over.

Maimonides has written that just as a piece of metal shaped in the form of a horseshoe must be bent to-the opposite extreme before it can be made straight, so man must go to the opposite extreme in rooting out sin from his personality before he can arrive at the ideal middle road. Humankind’s paramount response to the absolute evil of the Holocaust must, therefore, be to bend to-its opposite-extreme compassion and activism on behalf of good. As Rabbi Kook, the late chief rabbi of Israel, once wrote, since the temple was destroyed because of fratricide and senseless hate, it will only be restored when we demonstrate their opposites-senseless love and compassion. Today, therefore, it should be the Christian and Jewish obligation to categorically reject the theological strain of thought present in both traditions that suggests that it is rhe Jews’ sins that bring upon them suffering or that the Jews are predestined to be the world’s eternal suffering servants. Nothing less than such a radical response is sufficient to ensure that such a Holocaust will never happen again.

Untermensch vs. "In the Image of God"

In Treblinka there was a man named Yankel Wiernik, a carpenter. During the uprising, together with those who participated in it, he managed to escape and he wrote his story. “Dear reader,” he says, “...I who saw the doom of three generations must keep on living for the sake of the future. The world must be told of what happened.

“Between 450 and 500 persons were crowded into a chamber measuring 125 square feet in Treblinka. Parents carried their children in the vain hope of saving them from dearth. On the way to their doom they were pushed and beaten with rifle butts and gas pipes. Dogs were set on them, barking, biting and tearing them. It lasted a short while. Then the doors were shut tightly with a bang. Twenty-five minutes later everybody was dead and they stood lifeless; there being no free space, they just leaned against each other. They no longer shouted because the thread of their lives had been broken.

They no longer had any needs or desires. Mothers held their children tightly in their arms. There were no more friends, no more enemies. There was no jealousy. All were equal. There was no longer any beauty or ugliness, for all looked yellow from the gas. There were no longer any rich or poor. All were equal. And why all this? That is the question I keep asking myself. My life is hard, very hard, I must live to tell the world about all this.”

Holocaust scholars note that in the early stages of the genocide, when Jews were rounded up and shot, Nazi morale became seriously impaired. How it was possible for the most cultured of Western societies to be transformed into one that systematically murdered millions of human beings for no reason other than that they were Jews? The Nazis, after all, were a civilized and cultured people. For them to wantonly slaughter innocent and defenseless men, women, and children in cold blood must have taken a great mental toll. The killing task became so gruesome and repugnant that soldiers began to defy orders from authorities. The extent of the revulsion toward the mass killing on the part of those soldiers actually engaged in it soon reached crisis proportion, threatening the integrity of the entire genocidal program. To resolve this crisis of disobedience, the Nazi leaders created physical and psychological distance between the killers and their victims. They were able to accomplish this by first sending the Jews away to concentration camps where a select group of hard-core “experts” would methodically conduct the slayings. That way the vast majority would be spared the gruesome task and responsibility for conducting the slaughter.

Second, this psychological distance was accomplished by propagating the idea that Jews were untermenschen, or “subhumans,” and were the single most corrupting feature of European society. While it may be difficult for civilized people to murder human beings, killing animals or subhumans would be far more palatable. The Jews were not only portrayed as untermenschen, they were transformed into the essence of satanic evil and painted as devils with supernatural powers capable of corrupting the purity of the Aryan race; Jews were like vermin infecting the entire European civilization. To reinforce this stereotype, Jews were placed into the most degrading conditions to make them feel like animals, or at least appear as such.
Thus, the Holocaust occurred because the Nazis became convinced that Jews were untermenschen, not human beings, whose lives were of no value. It stands to reason that a similar Holocaust of Jews or any other group could be avoided if we came to perceive all people not as detached objects of utilitarian value, but as human beings, created “in the image of God,” of absolute worth by their very existence. To destroy man is, in a very real sense, to destroy a part of God that is manifest in the world. To take responsibility for the welfare of man is to bring the day of salvation that much closer. In the nuclear age in which we have today, the Holocaust must serve as a warning to humankind, alerting him to his power to bring the entire world and history of civilization to an irreversible end.

**Questioning Authority**

The basic factor in the Ghetto’s lack of preparation for armed resistance was psychological. ... We fell victim to Our faith in mankind, our belief that humanity had set limits to the degradation and persecution of one’s fellow man.

When the prosecution at the Nuremberg trials conducted after World War II asked the Nazi prisoners why they committed such horrible atrocities, their response invariably was that they were just following orders. Some twenty-five years later, American soldiers, defending their role in the incidents at My Lai, offered a similar rationale. The fact is that soldiers are inculcated with the idea of obeying orders from their superiors. Indeed, we are all taught to respect authority and to abide by the law. What is so disturbing is that people tend to blindly follow orders from authority figures, particularly ones wearing official uniforms, such as policemen, doctors, or priests. This was demonstrated rather dramatically and conclusively by the Milgram scientific experiments on obedience conducted at Yale University. In the study, a man posing as a doctor told an unwitting subject to administer electric shocks to a man sitting behind a glass wall each time he answered a question incorrectly. The subject could see the man and hear his feigned cries; in reality, the man was not being shocked but was part of the experimental team. The study found that despite the fact that the subjects genuinely believed that the actors were being hurt, the majority of them were willing to continue administering what they thought were high-voltage shock currents at the urging of the doctor conducting the experiment. Even after the actor pretended to fall into a state of unconsciousness from the shock treatment, there were many who continued to administer shock. The study revealed that even responsible and decent people were willing to inflict pain and even death upon others, against their better judgment, due to their trust of an authority figure who reassured them by his status that what they were doing was all right.

It is revealing to note that the closer in proximity the subject was to the conductor of the experiment, the more inclined he was to abide by the experimenter’s orders to administer shocks. Conversely, the closer the proximity between him and the actor being shocked, the more likely he was to refuse to abide by the orders to administer shock. Physical distance from a subject apparently plays a major role in creating psychological detachment from him, as well. Thus, people are inclined to be sympathetic toward those to whom they are closer, and more likely to inflict harm upon those distant from them. While society must obviously be based on a healthy respect for the law and on obedience to authority, it should be equally obvious that we must learn to question the moral resoluteness of authority figures and the moral integrity of their orders. We ought not to obey authority figures blindly. We ought to obey them, not because of their titles, degrees, or uniforms, but because of their superior knowledge and experience, and the ethical correctness of their views. We ought also to be morally discerning and resolute enough to disobey laws and orders that go against our conscience. This is a radical, albeit necessary, solution. None other will suffice after the Holocaust.

That people in Western society tend to feel alienated, estranged, and detached from each other is well-known. So is the fact that as a result of those feelings, people often are not inclined to come to the aid of someone in distress. This pervasive bystander apathy was at work in the tragic case of Kitty Genovese who was raped and murdered on a New York street in 1964 while dozens of people hearing her cries for help did nothing to intervene. No one even bothered to call the police. The fact that the bystanders could easily have alerted the authorities anonymously but chose not to suggests that more was at work than a fear of becoming involved.

In fact, it was the pervasiveness of these very same forces that enabled German society to be swept away by Nazism. Hard-core Nazi anti-Semites were able to rely not only on the widespread, deeply ingrained antipathy toward Jews, but also on basically good people’s passive acceptance of and indifference to the drastic measures the Nazis were taking. The Nazi seizure of power proved Edmund Burke’s statement that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing. The Holocaust demonstrated that silence and lack of involvement in realpolitik can ultimately lead to the triumph of evil and injustice.

The Torah presents a fundamentally different model of how humans should interact in society. When Cain killed Abel G d asked, “Where is Abel your brother?” (Gen. 4:9). The rabbis point out that God, of course, knew what had happened to Abel but that he posed the question so that Cain would confront himself and take responsibility for his actions.
Underlying God's question was the notion that man is responsible for the welfare of his fellow man. He is his brother's keeper! The Torah bids us to come to the aid even of an animal suffering under a heavy burden. The prophets stressed this same theme repeatedly, although none perhaps as eloquently as Isaiah, who posited that man's primary duty is "to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke ... to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh" (58:67).

One of the few anecdotes emanating from the Holocaust tells of two Jews who were lined up against a wall, about to be shot. One Jew began kicking, screaming, and cursing at the Nazis. The other, turning to him, said, "Quite, you might get them angry and who knows what they'll do to us then!" In fact, silence and passivity can be blasphemous and obscene, while action and resistance can be a divine obligation. Arthur Morse writes, "If genocide is to be prevented in the future, we must understand how it happened in the past—not in terms of the killers and the killed, but of the bystander." Hitler proceeded slowly and cautiously with his genocidal plans, constantly testing the nations of the free world and evaluating their response at each step of the way. What he found was little, if any, worldwide outrage or criticism. It was that silence that convinced him that Jewish lives were expendable and that no one would act to save the Jews from annihilation. He was even convinced that the world would, in the end, thank him for ridding it of Jews.

When Hitler began killing the infirm and handicapped in his euthanasia program there was immediate, massive demonstration of public outrage which forced him to stop. Dare we consider the possibility that had there been a similar, spontaneous demonstration of overwhelming revulsion to the murder of Jews, the Holocaust might not have taken place? Dare we not?

Martyrdom and Power

Thus says the LORD:
"a voice is heard in Rama, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not."
(Jeremiah 31:15)

When the Roman emperor Vespasian destroyed the second temple, he granted the Jewish leader Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakka his request that the village of Yavneh be spared from destruction and designated as a site for yeshiva, or "seminary." While ben Zakka's request may very well have saved Pharisaic Judaism and enabled Judaism as a whole to survive, it also established a pattern of helplessness and powerlessness, which would characterize the Jewish condition for centuries to come. Indeed, from the time of the destruction of the second temple in 70 C.E. until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jews have been a people devoid of power.

Throughout their long exile, Jews have lived at the good graces and, often, at the capricious whim of other nations. At times there were permitted to participate in the economic, social, and cultural life of society, at times they were not. Like ben Zakka, they were willing to relinquish their quest for power and to assume a low social profile in the hope of finding a haven in which to live and to practice their ancestral faith. For the most part, however, this was not to be. Jews have suffered inquisitions, autos-da-fe, ghettos, pogroms, blood libels, and wholesale slaughter. They were expelled at one time or another from virtually every country in "Christian Europe." Their fate was determined by the fact that they were at the total mercy of the host countries and utterly powerless to alter their situation. Even the theological disputation in which Jews where forced to engage during the Middle Ages did not provide them with a genuine opportunity to wield power or to demonstrate the veracity of their faith. Whether they won or lost the debates, the tragic results remained the same—the persecution of the local Jewish community.

It was Jewish powerlessness that made their persecution possible. It was that condition that made them attractive targets and that may even have invited their oppression, although one must take care not to ascribe blame to the innocent victims. Tragically, often the only element of power Jews wielded over their destinies lay in their freedom to decide whether to give up their faith or to suffer martyrdom. Jewish martyrdom became so common that, in time, the theological doctrine of kiddush haschem, or "sanctification of God's name," became associated more with acts of sanctification through death than through life.

It should be abundantly clear that powerlessness, combined with an absolute reliance on the good will of others, including God, has a rather poor track record in Jewish consciousness and experience. For it was precisely those factors that made the Holocaust possible. Jews, along with many Christians, have developed a new understanding of God, history, and the divine-human relationship after that conflagration.
Jews today have overwhelmingly resolved—often unconsciously—to reject the deeply ingrained, centuries-old tradition of sanctifying God's name through death and passive acts of martyrdom. Instead, they have collectively resolved to hallow God's name by surviving and by leading a sanctified life in this, as yet, unredeemed world. No longer will Jews accept martyrdom as a religious ideal. They have vowed to live! Like the psalmist long ago, Jews today collectively declare, "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD" (Ps. 118:17).

Noted philosopher and Holocaust survivor, Emil Fackenheim, has written that a six-hundred-fourteenth commandment is now incumbent upon Jews (the traditional rabbinic view is that the Torah contains 613 commandments): to survive and not grant Hitler a posthumous victory. Hitler sought to destroy the entire Jewish people. The Jewish response must be to live and rob him of that victory. Jews have solemnly vowed never to allow such a catastrophe to recur. Never, ever, again. Failure to appreciate fully the intensity of this Jewish conviction portends the failure to understand either the contemporary Jew or his faith.

This Jewish commitment to survive, however, also means that Jews must be willing to reenter the arena of power after having been without it for almost two thousand years. Jews have overwhelmingly decided in favor of such a course. Those living in the State of Israel, the embodiment of this collective Jewish spirit, have exemplified the Jews' struggle to secure power in order to survive. Jews are preeminently aware that the difference between Entebbe in 1976 and Auschwitz in 1943 is that in the case of the former, they were able to exercise power and strength of will. As a result, dozens of Israeli lives were saved.

Jews continue to abhor war. They remain uncomfortable even with their moral and responsible exercise of power. Their pledge to survive, however, has required them to take up arms and, at times, bring bloodshed both upon themselves and upon their enemies seeking to destroy them. Men who never raised a hand in violence against others, of necessity, became fighter pilots. Fathers, who perhaps more than all others appreciated the value of human life, became paratroopers and tank operators. Israelis are often characterized as having a "Masada complex." (Masada was the fortress where the Jewish Zealors made their last stand against the Romans in 73 C.E. and where they committed mass suicide rather than succumb to the Romans.) In truth, their collective psyche might better be described as "Samsonite." For like the biblical Samson, Israeli Jews today are prepared to sacrifice their lives through acts of resistance, not through passive martyrdom. In the nuclear age in which we live, such a "Samsonite complex" is a very dangerous thing, indeed. It can, in a very real sense, bring down the whole house.

American Jews have also resolved to enter the realm of power, albeit in a different manner than their Israeli coreligionists. They are deeply conscious of the fact that while they were vocal during the Holocaust, they had neither the political resolve nor clout to affect change in United States policy.

American Jews learned of their need for political, economic, and social power. They recognized that it was those forces that bring about greater freedom, autonomy, and control over their destiny. They also realized their vulnerability without power and the ineffectiveness of pleas based solely on good will and not backed by organized muscle.

The new American Jewish political assertiveness on behalf of oppressed world Jewry, even their activism in lobbying for such things as the sale of guns, planes, and bombs to Israel, stems from their determination to survive and, out of necessity, to enter the realm of power. For, while bombs may destroy and war may seem like hell, these necessary evils can also help ensure the preservation of the Jewish people and civilization. Post-Holocaust Jews have learned that while power can corrupt and absolute power can corrupt absolutely, as Irving Greenberg has noted, "Absolute powerlessness corrupts even more."

This new worldview admittedly involves great risk because it can so readily be abused. For while the possession of power has many positive consequences (most notably, the ability to exert control over one's destiny), it also frequently carries with it many negative ones (such as the immoral use of power and the insatiable quest for more).

It is easy for a society to move from one that "supports a military" to one that "is militaristic"; from one that hates war to one that makes war; from one that uses power sparingly, responsibly, and only when absolutely necessary, to one that is intoxicated by power and that wields it constantly. Nevertheless, Jews have chosen to risk these dangers, believing that they have no choice if they are to survive. The real test of their ethical character comes now that they do possess power.

One of the greatest challenges facing the Jewish people today is whether they can avoid the abuses— that often accompany power and strength. Golda Meir, the late prime minister of Israel who was preeminently conscious both of the pitfalls and necessities of power, once
remarked that while Jews might some day forgive the Arabs for killing their sons and daughters, it would be much harder for them ever to forgive the Arabs for making them into killers. Such is the toll Jews have, of necessity, had to pay. She also stated, however, that if the choice for Israel is between exercising power and being alive and unpopular among the nations of the world, or being destroyed and lauded, Israel will unequivocally choose the former. If the choice for Jews in this, as yet, unredempted and imperfect world is either not to wield power and to be slaughtered, or to assume the risks and responsibilities of power and to survive, Jews have unanimously resolved to accept the latter. For survival is itself a moral act and for the post-Holocaust Jew it is also his religious obligation.

In one of his sermons, Protestant thinker Reinhold Niebuhr said, "Love without power simply surrenders the world to power without love. How to make power express love, and love humanize power, is the distinctive task of the church of Christ for the next hundred years." It is also one of the most compelling challenges facing Jews today. For the first time in centuries Jews can be judged, not by the way they have suffered under the abuse of power by others, but by the manner in which they themselves wield power. And therein lies the profound test to Jewish life today.

Failure of a Universalist Ethos

I pinched my face. Was I still alive? Was I awake? I could not believe it. How could it be possible for them to burn people, children, and for the world to keep silent? No, none of this could be true. It was a nightmare… Soon I should wake with a start, my heart pounding, and find myself back in the bedroom of my childhood, among my books."

Nineteenth-century Jewish reactions to the seductive call of modernity and emancipation, and to the newfound Jewish acceptance in Western Gentile society, varied tremendously. Some Jews dropped out of Jewish life entirely and chose to assimilate into secular nationalistic culture instead. Some converted to Christianity, mainly to advance their social and economic stations in life. Still others continued to affirm their Jewishness through the new movements of Reform, Conservative, and neo-Orthodox Judaism. What was common to virtually all the Jewish responses was their rootedness in a strong optimistic belief in the equality of man and universally of the human condition.

The Jews' willingness to embrace such a universalist ethos, however, often came at the expense of their essential Jewish character. Many Jews willingly shed aspects of their traditions and distinctive Jewish traits in order to become fully accepted by mainstream Gentile society. The pressures upon Jews to accommodate the mores of Gentile society became so intense that even committed Jews tended to subscribe to the pithy advice of the time: "Be a person in your outside life but a Jew in your tent."

Nineteenth-century western European Jews more than repaid their debt to society for giving them their freedom by becoming proud, loyal citizens of the countries in which they lived. Jews prided themselves in being first and foremost good nationalists, referring to themselves, for example, as Germans or Frenchmen "of the Mosaic (or Israelite) persuasion," but rarely openly calling themselves Jews. Most of them opposed Zionism, which they felt conflicted with their allegiance to their homeland. Reform Judaism even denied the concept of Jewish nationhood entirely.

These and other such categorically optimistic and universal worldviews based on the goodness of man and the progressiveness of modernity were effectively shattered by the events of the Holocaust. After all, the Holocaust was unleashed by Germany, the most enlightened, civilized, and progressive European nation of its time. The Holocaust demonstrated rather persuasively the dangers of giving ultimacy even to (potentially) fine values such as universalism, nationalism, and the traditional Jewish doctrine of the goodness of man.

It was precisely their endorsement of a universalist view of the world, the oneness of humanity and the nobility of the German spirit, that blinded Jews to the unfolding disaster and led them to believe that a Holocaust could never happen, certainly not in Germany. Man's strong inclination to sin was tragically forgotten. Highly decorated German Jews who had fought for the fatherland in World War I, secular, universalist Jews who denied their Jewishness, Jews who had converted to Christianity, even those who had only one Jewish grandparent, Jews with a strong German heritage and nationalist loyalties none could escape their Jewish identities; none could flee from their common destiny. They all met a radically particularistic death at the hands of the Nazis-as Jews.

It was not until 1967, when the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War again threatened the survival of millions of Jews that even American Jews became fully comfortable asserting their distinctively Jewish causes and identities. Then Jews felt abandoned and deserted by the world-again-despite their finest efforts at a dialogue with their non-Jewish friends and neighbors over the years. The deafening silence they met with at their critical time of need, when their very survival was again at stake, prompted most Jews to utterly reject a universalist ethos which was
not rooted in Jewish particularism and balanced by self-reliance and unabashed Jewish pride.

Jewish pride and identity soared in the aftermath of the stunning Israeli military victory in 1967. Many secular and assimilated Jews became caught up with their Jewishness for the first time in their lives, and they became concerned with issues such as the security of Israel and world Jewry. The organized Jewish community reflected this shift in Jewish values and consciousness by likewise turning inward and becoming more deeply and aggressively involved in narrower Jewish agendas.

The challenge facing Jews today remains how to balance their belief in the universality and oneness of the human condition with their commitment to the survival of a distinctive Jewish faith and peoplehood. While Jews have shifted in pendulum fashion between these two poles, they have moved much closer toward the ideal balance in recent years. Evidence of this can be found in their renewed involvement in issues such as world hunger, while at the same time maintaining unflinching support for narrower Jewish concerns such as Israel, Russian Jewry, the Jewish poor and aged, and so on. The rabbis in the Talmud expressed this ideal best: “If I am not for myself who will be for me? But if I am only for myself what am I? And if not now, when?” (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:14).

Duty to Support Israel

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. (Ps. 126:1)

Of the many Jewish responses to the Holocaust, the obligation to support the State of Israel is perhaps both the most widely accepted and the most deeply felt. And while American Jews support Israel for biblical, historical, political, moral, geo-strategic, and other reasons, their love for her transcends them all; their commitment to her survival is absolute. Israel is the symbol of the contemporary Jewish resolve to live after having been tormented and persecuted for centuries. She epitomizes the Jewish rebirth as a dynamic living people.

In addition to the staggering loss of life in the Holocaust, the annihilation of six million Jews—one-third of the entire Jewish population—brought centuries of European Jewish civilization to an abrupt and irreversible end. Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann defiantly exclaimed that although the Nazis were unsuccessful in destroying all the world’s Jews, he would go to his grave laughing, convinced that the Jews could never recover from the Holocaust’s devastating blow to their life center. For among the dead were 80 percent of the world’s Torah and Talmud scholars, students, and teachers who were alive in 1937. The magnitude and intensity of suffering threatened the remaining Jewish community with radical despair. Remarkably, the remnants of that cataclysm had the strength and determination to rebuild their lives. A national Jewish homeland became the cornerstone of their dreams; its national anthem, the Hatikvah, meaning “the hope,” became their lifeblood. They dreamed and pledged, in the words of the Hatikvah, “to be a free nation in our homeland, the land of Zion and Jerusalem.”

Although Jews have not yet fully grasped the implications of Israel’s rebirth upon their lives, many deeply believe that the events of our day, particularly the ingathering of Holocaust survivors and other Jews from all four corners of the world into a free, democratic Jewish state, signal the beginning of the world’s redemption. Indeed, the Israeli chief rabbinate has introduced a prayer characterizing Israel as the “beginning of the sprouting of our redemption” into the weekly Shabbat prayer service. Like Ezekiel, Jews in this generation gazed into the valley of death and saw only dry, lifeless bones (Ezek. 37). They, too, asked, “Will these bones ever live?” And behold, a miracle—the bones were revived, Israel came into being and her people came into life reborn.

The State of Israel is not merely some political entity or geographical area of casual interest for Jews. Her existence as a free sovereign, and secure nation is the most central affirmation Jews have salvaged from the rubble of history and from the ashes of Auschwitz. The existence of Israel goes to the very Core of Jewish identity today. Not surprisingly, Jews have backed up their convictions with an almost obsessive activism on her behalf. They have collectively declared, “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest...” (Isa. 62:1). For Jews believe very deeply that if the Holocaust, indeed, imposes a new six-hundred-fourteenth commandment upon them to survive, it is the State of Israel that will ensure that survival.

A delicate but powerful analogy can be drawn between the Jew’s commitment to Israel and the Christian’s commitment to Christ. Just as Christians affirm that an indissoluble link exists between Jesus’ death and resurrection, so Jews today profess that an ineradicable tie links them in their death at Auschwitz and their rebirth in Jerusalem. And just as the bond between death and resurrection shapes the very backbone of the Christian identity, so it constitutes the driving force of the contemporary Jewish psyche.

Israel offers the Jews redemptive hope after having been engulfed by death, darkness, and despair. She represents the Jewish Easter Sunday! Just as Christians mark that solemn day by proclaiming, “Behold, Christ has risen,” so Jews declare, “am Yisrael chai”—the Jewish people has arisen again and continues to live! Just as Christians cannot sever Good Friday from Easter Sunday, so Jews cannot
HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

speak only of death without celebrating its concomitant reality, the resurrection of their people through Israel. And just as the theological nexus linking Good Friday with Easter Sunday shapes the character of Christians and constitutes the sine qua non of the Christian faith, so Israel in the post-Holocaust Jewish mindset embodies the totality of Jewish hopes for survival and constitutes the quintessence of all Jewish affirmations.

While it is blasphemous to link the two events in such a manner as to regard the State of Israel as some sort of divinely recompense or atonement for the Holocaust, the fact that Jews went from the darkest and deepest abyss to the greatest, brightest heights in a matter of a few years cannot be casually ignored. The road to Jerusalem was paved with ashes from the Holocaust. For many Jews, Israel is God's final chance to redeem himself from his breach of the covenant in the Holocaust.

While there is no answer to the Holocaust, Israel enables the Jew at least to bear the burden of its agony. As the Bible states, "For the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem" (Isa. 52:9). Heschel poetically noted that after the Holocaust, Jews were mourning widows. However, after Israel, Jews became brides again.

Condemning anti-Semitism, feeling remorse for past incidents of persecution against Jews, and shedding tears over the tragedy to befall the Jews in the Holocaust—such feelings are regarded by Jews as admirable but insufficient Christian responses to the history of anti-Semitism culminating in the Holocaust. A strong commitment backed up by action toward ensuring the present and future survival of Israel and the Jewish people is also essential. Christians must be especially sensitive not to sever the link that Jews themselves make between death and resurrection, granting Jews a condition of suffering and affliction but not of life reborn. Supporting the beleaguered State of Israel after the Holocaust is one of the most profound acts of friendship Christians can extend toward Jews. Franklin Littell, noted Christian historian, expressed this idea best when he stated:

The threat of a Second Holocaust (the destruction of Israel), the pressure upon Russian Jewry to assimilate and vanish, the ideological attacks of Neo-Nazis and Communists and some self-styled "liberal Christians" upon the Jews' continued survival, make Israel—the people, the land, the state—the focal point of present debate. It is not possible to love a "Spiritual Israel" and hate the earthly Israel. It is not possible to honor and obey the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and wish evil to the Jewish people. To say it is easy to see those who seek Jerusalem's destruction and become numbered a faithful Christian. It was not possible in the Germany of the Third Reich, and it is not possible today in America.

Jews believe very deeply that to turn one's back on Israel and the Jewish people is to rebel against God and to fail to heed his harkenmg cry calling out from the sheol of dry bones of Auschwitz to ensure Jewish survival! To abandon Israel—the nation and people—is to desert both God and the Bible. Christians, no less than Jews, must declare, "am Yisrael chai ve'ychayeh - the Jewish people lives and shall live." They, no less than Jews, must pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for the welfare of its inhabitants.

The Holocaust was one of the most shattering events ever experienced by the Jewish people, perhaps the most shattering both in terms of its magnitude and its lasting impact on Jewish life and psyche. Whether it be the State of Israel's policies and obsession for security, Jewish anxieties over the eruption of incidents of anti-Semitism, Jewish attitudes toward non-Jews, the Jewish religion today, indeed, Jewish life as a whole—are equally incomprehensible to the outsider when not viewed through the value-transforming prism of the seminal Holocaust event.

Conclusion

The primary imperative Jews have elicited from the Holocaust is to live, and never to allow a similar Holocaust to occur again. This resolve has prompted them to grapple with the issue of the moral uses and abuses of power as they have not grappled with it for nearly two thousand years. The Holocaust has also forced Jews to struggle with many fundamental doctrines and affirmations that have guided Jewish life for generations. Nothing less than the very existence of the covenant with God has been brought into question. Remarkably, indeed, miraculously, Jews and Judaism have survived the cataclysm and have even undergone a renewal and rejuvenation. Jews remain resolute in bearing the message of God and in serving as his witnesses in this, as yet, unredeemed world. They continue to pray, hope, and work for the coming of the Messiah and salvation of the world.

The primary imperative to be elicited by Christians from the Holocaust is equally as compelling as is that of the Jews to expunge any and all traces of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism from their midst. Christians no less than Jews must struggle with their traditions and cardinal affirmations in light of the challenges posed by the Holocaust. They, too, are divinely obligated to ensure Jewish survival and to prevent a future Holocaust.
affirmations in light of the challenges posed by the Holocaust. They, too, are divinely obligated to ensure Jewish survival and to prevent a future Holocaust.

In truth, any lessons to be derived from the Holocaust actually transcend any parochial perspectives that might separately guide either the Christian or Jewish communities. We live today in a nuclear reality. Now, more than ever before, it is imperative that humankind break the vicious cycle of war and violence, and learn to live together in peace. The Holocaust must shock us into a new sobriety. It must serve as an alarm signaling man to alter fundamentally his ways and outlook. For whatever else the Holocaust may be, it is a warning—perhaps humankind’s last—to ensure his very existence.