

## POST-HOLOCAUST/SHOAH THEOLOGY

*Then the Lord answered Job  
out of the storm (Job 38:1)*<sup>1</sup>

Theology should be nothing else than *fides quaerens intellectum*. Post-Holocaust theology should be the attempt, from the standpoint of Christian faith, to *think* about the massive extermination of Jews perpetrated by the Nazis in Europe, essentially in the years 1941-1945, its significance and consequences. Though the horror of the crime tends to stupefy our minds and suspicions of Christian responsibilities make us frightfully vulnerable to self-protective temptations, we may not evade the call to take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5, NASB). We do heed Elie Wiesel's warning: "There can be no theology after Auschwitz, and no theology whatsoever about Auschwitz. (...) One can never understand the event with God; one cannot understand the event without God. Theology? The logos of God? Who am I to explain God?"<sup>2</sup> We surely have no intention of "explaining God" and our goal is not to "understand" the event: but, *with* our merciful God, under the teaching of his *Logos* and the guiding assistance of his Spirit, we do pray that we shall think in a more wholesome way of the event – rather than darkening his counsel "by words without knowledge."

"Holocaust" is the common designation in English. Prestigious voices, such as Elie Wiesel's,<sup>3</sup> again, have deplored this lexical choice, with the comment that a "holocaust" is a *sacrifice* offered to God – the opposite of the brutal murder of millions of helpless human beings. We may note, however, that "holocaust" may be used of sacrifices to *false* gods (2 Kgs 16:13), and the idols of Nazi racism bear a family resemblance with Molech or Chemosh who also demanded burning children as their daily fare... Two Hebrew words have been introduced as rival designations, *חורבן* *hūrbān* חורבן דא *netfo tsoṃ* ;edoc noitpircsnart tcaxe na esu ot) הארש one finds *shoah* and I will use this familiar form)<sup>4</sup>; the former term, meaning "ruin, devastation," occurred for the destruction of the First and of the Second Temple in Jewish literature and is not very frequent (it does not appear in the Tanak, but the root is a common one in biblical Hebrew); the latter, meaning "storm, tempest" (Prov 1:27) and then "disaster, calamity" (Is 47:11) was used by Polish Jews *as soon as 1940* for what was beginning to befall them.<sup>5</sup> It has become the preferred word on the European Continent, definitely so among French-speaking Jews, and I will follow suit.

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical quotations adopt the NIV rendering, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>2</sup> Wiesel's part in Ekkehard Schuster & Reinhold Boschert-Kimmig, *Hope against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust*, transl. By J. Matthew Ashley (New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999) 93.

<sup>3</sup> Especially in *Job or God in the Storm*, according to Jean-Claude Favez, "Elie Wiesel et la Shoah," in David Banon *et. al.*, *Présence d'Elie Wiesel* (Geneva: Labor & Fides, 1990) 70. Wiesel contributed to the spread of the word but later regretted it.

<sup>4</sup> "Holocaust," *Encyclopædia Judaica*, ed. by Cecil Roth (Jerusalem & New York: Macmillan, 1971) VIII,831.

<sup>5</sup> David P. Kingdon, "Holocaust," *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, ed. by Campbell Campbell-Jack & Gavin J. McGrath (Leicester/Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006) 322a. He refers to Uriel Tal for this information (and also states that "Holocaust" came into use in English between 1957 and 1959).

"Post" in our title carries a nuance. We are not to concentrate on a theology *of* the Shoah.<sup>6</sup> Rather, as we consider the event from a distance, we shall bring into focus interpretations that developed afterwards, and we shall be interested in any fruit or effect we can perceive. In a first move, we shall try to locate the Shoah within a biblical framework, to identify some contours of the event and find the proper theological perspective. In a second part, we shall draw lessons, reflectively deepening and widening our apprehension. Thirdly, we shall look beyond the Shoah, searching for import and longer term significance. Since the topic of anti-Semitism must be dealt with separately, in another paper, we shall refrain, as far as possible, from mixing the two and exploring the connections between (what many label) "traditional Christian anti-Semitism" and the last massive destruction of Jews in Europe – the ideological underpinnings of Hitler's *Endlösung* of the *Judenfrage* were overtly anti-Christian, and, as regards the Shoah itself, Christians, whether nominal or authentic, can only be charged with insufficient reactions, culpable apathy, and not with initiative and active involvement.<sup>7</sup>

### **Seeing the Shoah biblically**

The facts have been established beyond any reasonable doubt. Whether the total number of Jewish victims was nearer to five or to six million may be left for historians to decide.<sup>8</sup> Some have argued that c. 250,000 among them were *Christian Jews*.<sup>9</sup> Non-Jews who were murdered in a similar fashion were about 6.5 million.<sup>10</sup> Objections launched by revisionists and negationists only prove one thing: the power of presuppositions (prejudice) and ideological interference in scholarly, especially historical, work<sup>11</sup>; technically competent academics may be blinded by subjective passion<sup>12</sup> and become manipulated manipulators in the warmth of a tightly knit "non-conformist" network. Against a reduction of factual reality to a social

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<sup>6</sup> Hence a difference with our article "Approches théologiques de la Shoah," *Théologie Evangélique* 6 (2007) 163-179, despite the overlap, that could not be avoided.

<sup>7</sup> Hitler branded Christianity as "an invention of a sick mind", as quoted by Richard Harries, *After the Evil: Christianity and Judaism in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 14. Alfred Rosenberg, the Nazi ideologist, had composed a complete program for the eradication of the central Christian convictions in the German National "Church" – the svatiska was to replace the Cross with everything both symbols represent (William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960] 240). Not all Nazi leaders were as radical as Rosenberg but it is clear that the *Führer's* frequent references to the "Almighty" did *not* mean "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." If "of the four commanders of the 'mobile killing units' (*Einsatzgruppen*) which murdered about five million people, including one and a half million Jews, one (...) was a Protestant minister" (Byron L. Sherwin & Susan G. Ament, in their introduction to the book they edited, *Encountering the Holocaust: An Interdisciplinary Survey* [Chicago: Impact Press, 1979] 2f), this is more an aberrant case, an appalling one indeed, than a representative specimen.

<sup>8</sup> With laudable scientific restraint, Raul Hilberg only claimed there were more than five million, cf. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Réflexions sur le génocide* (Bibliothèques 10/18; Paris: la Découverte, 1995, paperback 2004) 336.

<sup>9</sup> This information was brought to the April 1989 Willowbank "Consultation on the Christian Gospel and the Jewish People," either by Dr Tormod Engelsen or in close connection with his paper.

<sup>10</sup> Shirwin & Ament, 21.

<sup>11</sup> I may mention a thought-provoking symposium on this epistemological issue (but not on the Shoah): Bruce Kuklick & D. G. Hart, eds., *Religious Advocacy and American History* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1997); there are several remarkable essays, e.g. the balanced treatment by George M. Marsden, "Christian Advocacy and the Rules of the Academic Game," 3-27.

<sup>12</sup> Carol Iancu, *Les Mythes fondateurs de l'antisémitisme. De l'antiquité à nos jours* (Bibliothèque historique Privat; Toulouse: Privat, 2003) 144, recalls the first negationist assertions made by Maurice Bardèche in 1948, in *Nuremberg ou la Terre promise*, and Paul Rassinier in 1950, in *Le Mensonge d'Ulysse*. Bardèche was the brother-in-law of Robert Brasillach, who was executed after the war (a distinguished intellectual and highly gifted writer, he had penned outrageous attacks against the Jews and called for their extermination); one can imagine how the subjective factor influenced Bardèche's perception of the evidence. Rassinier, an anarchist, was a survivor of the Dora concentration camp: he remembered the *kapos*, some of them Jews I suppose, as more cruel than the Nazis, and this obsessive memory may have distorted his judgment.

construct one may note also that the evidence was sometimes able to break through prejudice: Claude Pressac had started as a revisionist and intended to expose the myth of the Gas Chambers, but he was constrained by what he found to revise his own opinion, and through his expertise the *Technique and Operation of the Gas (sic) Chambers* could be accurately defined and described.<sup>13</sup> Material proofs, despite S.S. efforts to erase all traces, and an immense variety of testimonies from trustworthy sources, from all spiritual and political quarters, are more than enough for certainty. We may trust the official account of the Shoah.

Debated, however, the *uniqueness* of the Shoah. In a sense, every event in history may be said to be unique. Biblical metaphysics – contrary to mere monism, which logically implies pantheism – maintains the truth of the Multiple, that is of each singularity. Biblical diction likes the phrase "never before had there been such a plague (...) nor will there ever be again" from the judgments of Egypt (I am quoting from Ex 10:14) to the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. (Mk 13:19, as commonly interpreted). At the same time, the unity of God's government, and of the universe's being in its origin and preservation, entails that analogies, "family resemblances," warrant the recognition of classes, categories: it rules out philosophical nominalism. One rightfully compares. Is the Shoah beyond all comparison? The unspeakable horror of the Shoah should not disqualify the unspeakable horror of the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem – remember Lamentations. The disaster of the Jewish War, with its extension into the second century and Hadrian's crushing of the Bar Kok̄bâ revolt (135) affected the Jewish population in Palestine no less dramatically than what happened in Europe eighteen centuries later.<sup>14</sup> David Wolf Silverman reminds us that "the Jews of the fifteenth century experienced the Spanish Expulsion [1492] as unique and in the words of one of their leaders and thinkers – Don Isaac Abravanel – as equivalent to the departure of the first human pair from the Garden of Eden."<sup>15</sup> For the victims of *pogroms* in the preceding centuries, and indeed since antiquity,<sup>16</sup> for a family submerged by hatred and seeing their children ripped or smashed to death, could there be a more unspeakable horror? Subjectively, isn't this already Auschwitz? "Pogrom," we are told, comes from Russian *po*, "entirely," and *gromit* (ГРОМИТЬ), "destroy."<sup>17</sup> After the assassination of the liberal tsar Alexander II (1881) there was a tidal wave of pogroms in Southern Russia that received the Hebrew name *Soufot haNeguev*,<sup>18</sup> "storms of the South" (סופות הנגב); it is remarkable that *sûfâ* (סופה) is a near-synonym of *šô'â* (שוואה), as evidenced in Proverbs 1:27. This does suggest that the Shoah cannot be isolated from the long series of persecutions and massacres that preceded it. "The late eminent historian Hermann G. Adler opposed the view that Nazism introduced an entirely new dimension into human destructiveness. In Adler's epigram, from the day of Original Sin the Holocaust became possible."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> According to Vidal-Naquet, 339f (who also comments that Pressac, for such a happy turn, did not acquire the true historian's competence).

<sup>14</sup> So argues John J. Johnson, "Should the Holocaust Force Us to Rethink Our View of God and Evil?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 52/1 (2001) 124.

<sup>15</sup> "The Holocaust and the Reality of Evil," in *Evangelicals and Jews in an Age of Pluralism*, ed. by Marc H. Tanenbaum, Marvin R. Wilson & A. James Rudin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 272.

<sup>16</sup> Especially in Egypt, where Jews were many. Fadyev Lovsky, *Antisémitisme et mystère d'Israël* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1955) 48 recalls the Elephantine riots of 411-410 B.C. and, 60, the bloody conflict under Claudius, in Alexandria (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* – Περὶ τοῦ Ἰουδαϊκοῦ Πολέμου – II,xviii,7-8).

<sup>17</sup> C. Iancu, 81.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* I reproduce Iancu's transcription. To my comment on the two Hebrew words I may add that Horace Meyer Kallen, in the article "Pogrom," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1961 edition) XVIII,115a, asserts that *pogrom*, in Russian, was "[o]riginally the word for 'storm.'" I am not able to substantiate the claim.

<sup>19</sup> A. Roy Eckardt with Alice L. Eckardt, *Long Night's Journey into Day: Life and Faith after the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982) 44.

Some writers go one step further than the stress on uniqueness. Elie Wiesel can affirm: "Auschwitz can only be the absolute revelation of something absolute, absolute evil."<sup>20</sup> The Eckardts also use the phrase "absolute evil."<sup>21</sup> Franklin H. Littell urges that the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel are events as important to our faith as the Exodus and the fall of Rome.<sup>22</sup> One sympathises fully with the intention of such a language, to express maximum indignation and abhorrence. It answers to a truthful experience: when we look into the Shoah we see opening unfathomable abysses of wickedness. Such evil is a bottomless pit. Yet, if we were perfectly lucid and properly sensitive, we would uncover a similar abyss in every form of evil, in "ordinary" fits of anger and common insults (Mat 5:22). How can there be something so ugly, so vicious and mean in me? How can I take some pleasure in such villainy? Bottomless. But this, to say it bluntly, does not warrant "absolute" language. A loose and emotional use of that register of words does not foster rigorous thinking. An absolute is a second god, and we should realise that there can be no relation, no contact, between different absolutes (this is even unthinkable)! A central insight of the biblical doctrine of evil, with confirmation in the phenomenology of human experience, is the *secondary* character of evil, radically relative to the good: evil is deprivation, the lack of some goodness that was due<sup>23</sup>; evil is the perversion or corruption of the good. Though few among the "wise," or would-be wise, show this penetration, we should discern that only within the framework of the sovereign divine rule, the rule of Goodness in Person, can evil be denounced, can evil be named. Without that framework, indignation disintegrates and dissolves into meaninglessness.<sup>24</sup> Many contemporaries, who have given in under relativistic propaganda and desperately lack bench marks to live by, do keep the Shoah as a substitute Reference, an *Ersatz* absolute; but this reflects the disorientation of our late modernity; Christian theology should know better.<sup>25</sup>

Whether the Shoah is more important than the fall of Rome, time will tell (or the Last Day); comparing it with the Exodus is more risky, inasmuch as God has revealed the significance of the work he accomplished "with outstretched arm" through his servant Moses – the equivalent is not available in the case of the Shoah. The Exodus is a key element in the structure of *Heilsgeschichte*, whereas the role of the Shoah still calls for further elucidation. I do not wish to deny *in advance* an important role – and it is likely to be tied to unique features of the Shoah. These may be recognised without falling into "absolute" language and should now be described as we go on drawing contours of the event.

Three features mark the Shoah to an unprecedented degree, in the bloody trail of pogroms and genocides: magnitude, method and de-humanising. Though history has known other large-scale massacres, the number of victims, the proportion among European Jews especially, is exceptional. I have argued elsewhere that ultimately, and radically, "quantity" *is* a "quality"

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<sup>20</sup> In Schuster & Boschert-Kimmig, 72.

<sup>21</sup> *Long Night's Journey*, 42. Cf. 53: "The 'devil' and 'antisemitism' are correlative symbols."

<sup>22</sup> In *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975) and "Christendom, Holocaust and Israel: The Importance for Christians of Recent Major Events in Jewish History," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 10 (1973) 483-497, as summarised by John Jefferson Davis, "The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy: An Evangelical Perspective," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29/1 (January 2005) 55.

<sup>23</sup> The mere absence of something good, as is inherent in finitude, should not be termed "evil" (contrary to those "negative" views of evil which call such an absence "metaphysical evil"): for humans, not to possess a third eye is no evil, but having only one (since having two belongs to the integrity of human nature) is evil indeed.

<sup>24</sup> I developed the argument in *Evil and the Cross: An Analytical Look at the Problem of Pain* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004 reprint). (I may add that I was not consulted on the sub-title wording; it does not translate my French one, "La pensée chrétienne aux prises avec le mal"; my book does not focus on *pain* but, as I consider more biblical, on *sin* as "capital evil".)

<sup>25</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, in Schuster & Boschert-Kimmig, 16, warns against turning "Auschwitz into a sort of 'negative religion' or 'negative myth' for Christians."

but suffice it to say that threshold effects (for all living creatures) and the organic dimension of a community – which is more than the addition of all its members – entail that magnitude changes quality. Its magnitude confers an awful qualitative uniqueness to the Shoah. The "body" of world-wide Jewry (it is real though it is very difficult to define) was mutilated, and the memory will last. Then the Shoah was unique at the level of method: "Outrageous though it may appear," Alistair McFadyen writes, "the holocaust was a triumph of rationality in planning and action, which was threatened wherever irrationality – even of over-zealousness – intruded into and interrupted efficient organisation."<sup>26</sup> The contrast with pogroms, the outbursts of mob violence, is striking. The machine was working, as it were, by itself, and the cogs in the machine felt little personal responsibility – we may remember that Himmler chose the gas chambers technique in order to *spare* the executioners' feelings, for the sake of efficiency.<sup>27</sup> Murder was turned into an industry. The place of method may be more than an illustration of German genius: a sign of the times. A key component in the method was the de-humanisation of the victims: *Untermenschen*. It was systematic, and the very presupposition of the system. Everything was done to downgrade the Jews (and the Gypsies, homosexuals, Communists, Jehovah Witnesses...) to a sub-human level, and in their own eyes. I remember reading that in the Treblinka death camp one S.S. had called his dog "Man" and would set the dog on a poor Jew: "Man, kill that dog!" Foundations were laid with the racist ideology that reduces humanity to biology. The ruling metaphor was taken quite literally (hence the good conscience of torturers): Jews were nothing else than vermin to be destroyed, pest to be eliminated, deadly bacilli, cancerous cells. De-humanisation almost always goes with murder, especially collective murder, but it reached perfection in the Shoah. The combination is perfectly adjusted to the main tenets of theological anthropology and ethics.

Reconnoitring contours of the Shoah in a biblical perspective also requires that we ask about applicable schemes, schemes which Scripture uses when disaster is to be interpreted. The first one is that of *retributive justice*. Time and time again, in the prophets, calamities and desolations are foretold as punishments of the people's sins. Few writers dare suggest that the Shoah was a divine punishment! There have been Jews, *h□<sup>a</sup> rédîm* and other high orthodox rabbis such as Jacob Israel Kanievisky or Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstamm.<sup>28</sup> The transgressions that attracted the Shoah have been assimilation (it had gone farthest in Germany), Jewish participation in the *haskalah* (Enlightenment), and Zionism. "Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar, for instance, could never accept the argument that the successes of the Zionist state reflect divine support for its existence. According to his interpretation of a famous passage at B. Ket. 111a, founding an independent Jewish state before the coming of the Messiah constitutes an open revolt against the sovereignty of God; it is a breach of the 'Three Oaths' the Lord imposed on the Israelites. Creation of the State thus invited a horrendous punishment, which he finds in the Holocaust."<sup>29</sup> Simone Veil, the Auschwitz survivor and highly respected political figure, remembers rabbis *in the concentration camp* following a similar line.<sup>30</sup> Among Christians, apparently, Daniel P. Fuller argued that the Deuteronomy 28 threats were then executed.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary sensitivities are so strongly opposed to the idea of

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<sup>26</sup> *Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 83. Cf. the comments by the Eckardts, 44.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Brown, "Orthodox Judaism," in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, ed. by Jacob Neusner & Alan J. Avery-Peck (Oxford, etc.: Blackwell, 2000, reprint 2004) 319.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 333. Cf. J. J. Davis, 56f.

<sup>30</sup> As quoted by Jean-Paul Rempp, *Israël, peuple, foi et terre. Esquisse d'une synthèse* (Carols : Excelsis, 2010), 32 n.19, who also mentions an "orthodox rabbi" recently (unnamed).

<sup>31</sup> "Why Was There an Auschwitz?" *Eternity* 15 (December 1964) 27-28, 32-38, according to J. J. Davis, 60f, to whom I owe the information.

retribution in history that we should pay some honour to the boldness of such a stand; people today are so afraid of being associated with Job's friends that they become most like them in conformity to majority "correctness." Who are we to rule out, as many clerics do, that God exercises judgments on the earth? Even the objection of "innocent" children is not decisive: if we take into account original sin, if we remember that all are born in sin (Ps 51:6 [Heb.6]; 58:3 [Heb.4]) and *by nature* subject to divine wrath (Eph 2:3), "innocence" is relative; if we agree with Hodge, and with J. J. Davis,<sup>32</sup> that children dying in infancy are presumptively elect, and, though sinners, included in the atonement, saved in Christ, the problem of children is no longer so acute. On the other hand, what counts as apostasy in the eyes of hyper-orthodox Jews is not assessed in the same way by Christian theology. The sins of Deuteronomy 28 are not *obviously* those of modern Jews. There is little warrant in the New Testament (against traditional Christian anti-Semitism) for the idea that all Jews, throughout history, remain under a curse and must be repeatedly punished. As Jesus, in utter sadness, foresees the fate of Jerusalem as the counterpart of his passion – he is the "green" tree, spiritually alive (cf. Ezek 17:24), and the people of the city the "dry" one, spiritually dead – he has in view the 70 A.D. catastrophe, not the XX<sup>th</sup> century Shoah. The cry of the crowd, according to Matthew 27:25, means that they assumed the responsibility of their action, but God's truer judgment is not even expressed, and in any case, it does not fall beyond the third and fourth generation.<sup>33</sup> We should therefore renounce the retributive scheme to interpret the Shoah.

The other biblical situation, not seldom encountered (very frequent in individual cases), is that of suffering *unrelated* to particular faults. For the faithful, it is the reverse side of their being in the world – for "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19, literally, "lies in the evil one"). Job offers the paradigm situation of the righteous one who suffers *because of his righteousness*, and that it may be further purified. In the New Testament *martyrdom*, which is one facet of Jesus' own death,<sup>34</sup> is the example of suffering for God's sake and a source of blessing. Can the Shoah bear an interpretation along those lines? Richard L. Rubenstein protests: "The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job."<sup>35</sup> But he speaks in Karamazov-like anger, and proclaims the "death of God."<sup>36</sup> J. J. Davis, on the contrary, sees the parallel with Job as significant: the role of Satan in Job corresponds to the "demonic dimensions of Hitler's genocidal project"; there is a "randomness" element in history (Eccl 9:11), things that happen unpredictably, independently of the order of justice – Job's sufferings, the Shoah – and this element helps purify religion from self-interest.<sup>37</sup> Davis similarly applies the concept of martyrdom: "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."<sup>38</sup> The

<sup>32</sup> "The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy," 73.

<sup>33</sup> See F. Lovsky's vigorous argument, *Antisémitisme*, 432-451 (with a strong emphasis on early Christian writers).

<sup>34</sup> John 18:37 (*marturêsô, μαρτυρήσω*), 1 Tim 6:13; the first martyr identified in the early church, Stephen, *imitates* Jesus Christ in his last words (Acts 7:59,60).

<sup>35</sup> *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966) 153, as quoted by J. J. Johnson, 125. Johnson himself, 125f, rather sees a convergence.

<sup>36</sup> According to Neil Gillman, "Contemporary Jewish Theology," in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, 454, Rubenstein writes: "The death of God is a cultural fact (...) the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources."

<sup>37</sup> "The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy," 75f; see especially n.98 (p.76): "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..."

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

problem, for Christian theology, concerns the value, *coram Deo*, of the Jews' righteousness and testimony. Stern New Testament statements suggest a negative assessment (Ph 3:6-9 on righteousness; John 7:28; 8:19,41ff,55, on the knowledge, and therefore confession, of God). At the same time, matters are complex. Paul do credit non-Christian Jews with real zeal for God, *zêlon theou* (ζηλον θεου), but misguided by ignorance or false knowledge, *ou kat'epignôsin* (ου κατ'επίγνωσιν). Paul can speak, in his defence before Agrippa, of the twelve tribes of his day as "hoping to see fulfilled" the promise, "as they earnestly serve God day and night" (Acts 26:7). Inasmuch as this positive element can be retained, we are not obligated simply to reject Davis' proposal. We may add that the sure privilege of the Jews "according to the flesh" is their natural, family, relationship to Jesus (Rom 9:5, *to kata sarka*, το κατα σάρκα, "as to fleshly origin"), and the hatred against them which culminated in the Shoah is bound to this family election<sup>39</sup>: there is a common factor, therefore, in the world's rejection of Jesus and of the Jewish people – there is a kinship between the Shoah and the Cross.

### **Digging deeper theologically**

When what happened in the Shoah is seen in a biblical perspective, some features spur on the theological mind to further reflection. One can, first, look more closely in the monstrous revelation of *evil*. Working towards the *Endlösung* involved myriads of very diverse people, some of them primitive, thugs and even morons, but many well-educated and rather refined, and most of them "average." As Hannah Arendt brought out in her report on Eichmann's trial, these men were so *ordinary*.<sup>40</sup> A deep comment was made on the Nazi doctors (who usually needed a fortnight, when arriving in concentration and death camps, to quieten their feelings), by a survivor: "But it is *demonic* that they were *not* demonic." "The lesson of Auschwitz is that 'ordinary people can commit demonic acts'."<sup>41</sup> How illustrative of the continuity Jesus revealed between the secret inclinations of the heart and spectacular crimes, and of the universal sinfulness! And the part *apathy* played must be mentioned. The Eckardts note with Elie Wiesel that "the victims suffered more 'from the indifference of the onlookers, than from the brutality of the executioner'."<sup>42</sup> Though there were many exceptions, and also noteworthy differences among European nations,<sup>43</sup> the vast majority did not actively oppose Hitler's program. The impression prevails that the Nazi enterprise could have been checked if more people *among those who did not hate the Jews* had reacted, in time. The efficacy of the Danish King's resistance and, less well-known, of the Sultan of Marocco (Mohammed V) who resisted the orders from the French collaborationist Vichy government,<sup>44</sup> suggest the same. "In order for evil to triumph, it is enough that good people do... *nothing*." Why is it so, why was it so in the Shoah? One reason, of course, is simple: in many situations, resistance would

<sup>39</sup> According to F. Lovsky, "La Théologie et Elie Wiesel," in *Présence d'Elie Wiesel*, 82, theology should "meditate Wiesel's conviction: the goal of the Shoah was to kill the Messiah, in case he had been born, and at any rate to destroy his family if he had not."

<sup>40</sup> *Eichmann à Jérusalem. Rapport sur la banalité du mal*, transl. by Anne Guérin (Folio Histoire; Paris: Gallimard, 1997 [1966<sup>1</sup>]), e.g. 460f. Cf. Vidal-Naquet, 266, and 287, the warning about criminal potentialities in democracy.

<sup>41</sup> Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology after Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 133, drawing on Robert J. Clifton's book on the Nazi Doctors.

<sup>42</sup> *Long Night's Journey*, 20.

<sup>43</sup> Jean Améry, a survivor, *Par-delà le crime et le châtement. Essai pour surmonter l'insurmontable*, transl. (from the German original) by Françoise Wuilmart (coll. Babel; Arles/Québec: Actes Sud/Leméac, 1995) 172, recounts how, when they were transferred from Auschwitz to Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen, peasant girls in Bohemia would run to them, despite S.S. guards, with bread and apples – in Germany, none.

<sup>44</sup> David Banon, "Isaac, la mort en face," in *Présence d'Elie Wiesel*, 51; he refused to impose the yellow star, and the Maroccan Jews were not molested. I do not ignore favourable circumstances in both these cases: in Denmark, Jews were very few, and the stakes were not high for the Nazis; Marocco was protected by geography...

have required *heroes*; who can boast he would be one? (Cf. Luke 22:33.) Readiness to self-sacrifice transcends ordinary Ethics. The power of propaganda and twisted information was on the Nazi side. The dependence of individuals (even individualistic individuals!) on collective norms and representations was evident, and it reveals a fateful trans-individual dimension of sinfulness. The *gradual* character of the murderous action was used with consummate skill (one remembers the parable of the frog in a pot of water on the stove – at first pleasantly warm...). The first measures did not appear much worse than what Jews had undergone for so many generations. The *Kristallnacht*, another pogrom... nobody imagined Auschwitz. The skill of the Nazis must be stressed: they showed, as Primo Levi said, "the Devil's knowledge of the human soul"<sup>45</sup>; they used all the mechanisms of human psychology and physiology, and were even able, in many cases, to turn the Jew "into the accomplice of his executioners."<sup>46</sup>

The perversion of skill and science draws attention to one aspect of the revelation of evil in the Shoah. *That* evil, supreme among evils, evidenced the corruption of *goodness*. Unthinkable as it may seem to us, loyalty to their group (among soldiers), devotion to their country, the conviction that they were redressing injustice and curing the world of a deadly disease, did drive executioners. Worthy motives! And this belongs essentially to evil: a borrowed, or rather stolen, essence (from God's good creation), turned poisonous. There is no lie which is not parasitic on a prior truth. Idolatry corrupts the beauty of a creature and its capacity for revealing God. Even murder, I venture to suggest, expresses the corruption of one demand of love: that the object of my love should not exist apart from me (love and hate pass so easily into each other!). The mass-murders of the Shoah did reveal evil as the corruption of the good.

The perfection of the *method*, which we observed, calls for a specific comment. It was the perversion and corruption of one form of rationality: "scientific and technical-bureaucratic reason."<sup>47</sup> It reveals the "totalitarian tendencies of technical-instrumental reason."<sup>48</sup> Elie Wiesel seeks no protective nuances: "I am convinced that what happened in Auschwitz is a result of rationalism."<sup>49</sup> The warning is dramatic against the divorcing of ends and means, so characteristic of our social life. Do we resist actively enough the "reification" so easily associated with the rule of instrumental reason? We should meditate upon the strange condemnation of the *census* taken by David (2 Sam 24). Why was it so grievous a sin? Critical scholars speak of the old "taboo" of counting heads, but we should not rule out the possibility that the Word of God be teaching us a precious spiritual and theological truth. Counting means reducing to the status of parts of a larger whole, items that can be added to one another: it involves the temptation to ignore the irreducible mystery of the person, the transcendence that belongs to God's image. This is why God only, in his unique Transcendence, can count heads – souls, and orders that a *redemption* price be paid when a census is taken in his name, for each one a *kôfêr nafšô* (כפר נפש, Exod 30:12). In Nazi camps, the *Häftling* lost his/her name and was reduced to a number, inscribed on his/her body; this may signal a danger not absent from our rational societies.

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<sup>45</sup> *Si c'est un homme [Se questo è un uomo]* (Paris: Julliard, 1987, Pocket edition 2003) 137; the French translation reads here "une connaissance diabolique de l'âme humaine."

<sup>46</sup> R. & A. Eckardt, 19.

<sup>47</sup> D. J. Fasching, 41.

<sup>48</sup> A. McFadyen, 88. He confesses his debt to Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), which I have not seen.

<sup>49</sup> In Schuster & Boschert-Kimmig, 71. He is faithful to the Kabbalah *hāsīdic* mysticism of his training in Transylvania (70, the difference between him and Levinas, who came from more rationalistic Lithuania).

We come again to the work of dehumanisation. It is worth reflecting on the "mechanisms" that were made to function. Reduction to biology relied on a theory of racial characteristics: Racism provided the explicit rationale for the Shoah. It should instruct us. It shows the hold pseudo-science can keep, through many years, in whole nations, at all levels of education; it shows the malignancy of improperly formed concepts (such as that of "race"); the danger of metaphors, such as the metaphor of "blood" and "blood purity," in which people uncritically invest their sense of identity. How vital the discipline, the therapy, of a sober Scriptural method! Another dimension of racism, more or less unconscious, would be worth investigating: the role of sexual determinations. F. Lovsky has observed "the erotic character of the German legislation" on race.<sup>50</sup> The form and force of repulsions betrayed the play of such factors. The central place of sexuality in a biblical anthropology would throw light on that component of the Shoah criminal behaviour, and *vice versa*. Still another "mechanism" that deserves exploration would be "scapegoating." Nazi propaganda prepared and legitimised the Shoah by making the Jews the scapegoats for all the ills of German society, Europe and even the world. Though his doctrine, in important chapters, must be criticised, René Girard may be of help here: theology should exploit some of his insights. Attacking the Jews is doing precisely what the 1<sup>st</sup> century Pharisees were doing, in Jesus' indictment.<sup>51</sup> Hitler, quite faithful to Nietzsche's thought (much more than Nietzschean scholars are willing to concede), perpetrated the genocide to eradicate that Judeo-Christian secularised legacy: the predominant concern for the victims.<sup>52</sup> Unfortunately, R. Girard does not see that the effective antidote to viciously inventing scapegoats is the one holy, divine, self-sacrifice: the Lamb of God who bears and takes away (double meaning of *airôn*, ἀΐρων, John 1:29) the sin of the world.

### **Looking beyond the Shoah**

Post-Holocaust/Shoah theology is interested in what happened, or is still to happen, after the event. Likely, it will shed some light on the import and significance (F. Lovsky rightly distinguishes between explanation and signification<sup>53</sup>).

The first fact, no one can deny, is simply: *survival*. A remnant did return from the camps. Deliverance materialised. The words of Psalm 66 came true: "For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, BUT YOU BROUGHT US TO A PLACE OF ABUNDANCE" (vv.10-12). Even Primo Levi, who remained a stranger to faith, can tell how they, the few who had been left in Auschwitz (too weak to walk), felt, when they discovered that the Germans were gone: "it is certain that the remembrance of biblical deliverances in the worst moments of distress went through every mind like a breath or a breeze."<sup>54</sup> Eliezer Berkovits, an Orthodox rabbi, insists that the same pattern of trial and *in extremis* salvation recurs in Scripture and history; he "cites the many acts of kindness, generosity and loyalty that occurred throughout the terror, the fact that the Final Solution ultimately failed..."<sup>55</sup> Hitler failed, and fell into the pit he had made (Ps 7:15). It is one of the

<sup>50</sup> *Antisémitisme*, 365 (366, the usual alliance of eroticism and paganism).

<sup>51</sup> *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*, recherches avec J. M. Oughourlian & Guy Lefort (Paris: Grasset, 1978) 196f.

<sup>52</sup> *Je vois Satan tomber comme l'éclair* (Livre de Poche; Paris: Grasset, 1999) 222, "The spiritual goal of Hitlerism, in my opinion, was to free Germany first, and then Europe, from the calling assigned by its religious tradition, the concern for victims"; Girard then comments on quotations from Nietzsche and, 227, complains that intellectuals deliberately ignore them. Hitler's enterprise failed, 228, but it avenges itself by turning the concern for victims into a caricature of itself in today's world. This is remarkably lucid.

<sup>53</sup> "La Théologie et Elie Wiesel," 83.

<sup>54</sup> *Si c'est un homme*, 246; the last words in French (I had no access to the Italian original) reads "comme un souffle dans tous les esprits"; I conjoined the two possibilities for "souffle," breath and breeze.

<sup>55</sup> N Gillman, 453, referring to Berkovits' *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973).

features of the Shoah, which the Eckardts mention,<sup>56</sup> that it was self-defeating: Hitler diverted military resources to satisfy his hatred of Jews which were missed in decisive battles! In this way, the victims contributed to the overthrow of the demonic tyranny. History bears out two main principles of God's dealings with Israel: permanence, in the form of a remnant, through dreadful ordeals (e.g., Am 9:8-10); punishment of evildoers, in God's own timing.

The summary of Berkovits' argument I just quoted goes on: "...the fact that the Final Solution finally failed, and pre-eminently the establishment of the State of Israel as dramatic revelations of God's lasting power over history and love for Israel."<sup>57</sup> The next post-Shoah event, Event, is the creation of the modern State of Israel. It is interesting to know that, for about twenty or thirty years, the Shoah was under-emphasised among Jews: they would rather enthusiastically identify with Israel; only when disappointment with the State grew, "Holocaust consciousness supplanted Israel consciousness, to some extent, as the focus of collective attention and the core of the Jewish 'civil religion'."<sup>58</sup> Yet, the close link with the Shoah cannot be doubted. Without the trauma of universal conscience, the Powers would not have granted Israel its recognition. Without the Shoah a limited number only would have made the "ascent," the *alyah* (a more exact transcription would read *“alīyā, עלייה”*).<sup>59</sup> Louis Goldberg combines both fruits of Shoah suffering, the political restoration of Israel (at least in part) and the saving testimony of believers in the camps which led other Jews in the camps to eternal life, to interpret Hitler as a “vessel of wrath” which God did use:

Another piece of an answer is that God led some of His choice believers into the camps. Because of the testimony of these special servants of God, many a Jewish person came to faith, either in the camps, or after being delivered. / Another part of the bits and pieces of an answer is that we can say that Hitler functioned much in the same way as did the pharaoh of the exodus. The more pharaoh hardened his heart, the more he became the vessel of wrath by which many Jewish people afterward would be able to escape out of Egypt. In the same way, Hitler was also the vessel of wrath by which many of those who remained after the war would go to Israel.<sup>60</sup>

Richard L. Rubenstein in his own way affirms the linkage: the return of Jews to the Land "has *religious* significance (...), but the idea that it is part of a divine plan for salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*) can only be affirmed if it is also claimed that the *Shoah* is equally a providential expression of the divine plan."<sup>61</sup> Richard S. Harvey writes: "A successful apologetic must seek to answer the theodic demands of Holocaust theology, whilst also seeking to articulate a continuing theological significance for the Jewish people which does not ignore the contemporary issue of the land of Israel..."<sup>62</sup> Discussing the various options of evangelical theologians on this land, on prophetic fulfilment, on Zionism, lies beyond the scope of the present paper. It is certain, however, that a Post-Holocaust/Shoah theology must make room for this extraordinary sequel: the restoration of a Jewish State after eighteen to

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<sup>56</sup> *Long Night's Journey*, 44.

<sup>57</sup> N. Gillman, *loc. cit.* (453).

<sup>58</sup> Yosef Gorny, "Judaism and Zionism," in *The Blackwell Companion to Judaism*, 489f (quoted 489). Jean-Paul Rempp, *Israël...*, 75 n.21, mentions that Avraham Burg, a former chairman of the Knesset, regrets that Israel's identity be almost exclusively defined through its relationship to the Shoah, and 76 n.24, quotes Georges Bensoussan: "Shoah hypermnesia leads to Zionism amnesia."

<sup>59</sup> Though we must remember, with Jean-Paul Rempp, 65 and n.2, that Zionism antedates the Shoah, and other factors were at play when the State of Israel was founded and acknowledged internationally.

<sup>60</sup> *God, Torah, Messiah: The Messianic Jewish Theology of Dr. Louis Goldberg*, ed. by Richard A. Robinson (San Francisco, CA: Purple Pomegranate Productions, 2009), 232. I was led to these lines by Richard Harvey's quotation, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Milton Keynes...: Paternoster, 2009), 93; Harvey quotes from the manuscript (p.80), and I found the passage in the book.

<sup>61</sup> "Some Reflections on 'The Odd Couple': A Reply to Martin Marty," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 44/1 (Winter 2009) 136.

<sup>62</sup> "Judaism," in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 376b.

twenty-one centuries (depending on the starting-point, between the Hasmoneans and Bar Kokbâ).

To many evangelical theologians (and in my own way, I would concur), the *alyah* is a "sign of the times." The question, therefore, is raised of a similar significance of the *Shoah*. J. J. Davis makes a strong point as he recalls the biblical theme of the *intensification* of evil before the end comes. The pattern is found in Ezekiel 38-39, Daniel 11-12, Matthew 24:2-27, 2 Thessalonians 2, Revelation 7:14.<sup>63</sup> He quotes from the Mishnah *Sotah* 9:15 and the Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 98a ("When you see a generation overwhelmed by troubles as by a river, await him," Is 59:19f).<sup>64</sup> The image of the "birth-pangs" of the Messianic age, the *h□avlə hammašiah* □ (חבלי המשיח) was well-established, and Jesus himself owned it and set it forth to interpret his own suffering (John 16:21). Davis' proposal is cautious enough to be accepted: the Holocaust/Shoah can be viewed as "an *anticipation* of the end and an example of the *intensification* of evil as history approaches its climax."<sup>65</sup> If, as I do, one hopes for and expects a large-scale turning to Yēšua' among Jews "according to the flesh," both the trial and the re-gathering on the Land may be seen as preparatory measures, before the final re-grafting. The conversion of most Christians, even "nominal" ones, from their older anti-Semitism, an observable effect of the Shoah, may remove a stumbling-block (who could have imagined popes visiting synagogues?). Let the Shoah mark the beginnings of the birth-pangs, and life surge from the dead!

Even the brightest hopes attached to the significance of the Shoah *do not explain* why the sovereign God permitted such horrendous evil to take place.<sup>66</sup> I am less fearful than J. J. Davis of what he calls a "fideistic" stance – I would dispute the use of the term – though I applaud his critique of popular "rational" theodicies.<sup>67</sup> When God, at last, answers Job "out of the storm" (*s<sup>e</sup>'arâ* fo mynonys raen a ,ס'ארעס'א [d]" ,הואש) he explain why evil and suffering occur?" John J. Johnson asks: "Does he explain why he, as an all-powerful God, allows such things? No. He does, however, impress upon Job the limits of Job's *understanding* of such things. What Job does learn here is that the ways of God are beyond the understanding of men, and that sometimes men and women of faith can only accept, in ignorance and humble piety, the ways of God toward his creatures."<sup>68</sup> A Post-Holocaust/Shoah theology will be the theology of humble trust, and confident hope!

Henri BLOCHER

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<sup>63</sup> "The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy," 70.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>66</sup> This thesis, in general terms, I develop in *Evil and the Cross*.

<sup>67</sup> "The Holocaust and the Problem of Theodicy," 62f for his rejection of "bare fideism" and 65-68, his evaluation of free-will, greater good, and limited God doctrines. Davis focuses on theodicy, with apologetic concerns; this paper has been composed from another angle.

<sup>68</sup> "Should the Holocaust Force us to Rethink...?" 125f.