Speaking of God after Auschwitz

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An exploration of various conceptions of God's power and goodness and how they may or may not help believers grapple with the horror of Auschwitz.

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Author's note: *The English text of the following essay, written at an earlier point in the history of reflection on this question, is made available for reference purposes in view of its recent appearance in German and Spanish.*

The fact that we are able to take up a topic such as "speaking of God after Auschwitz" indicates that a certain stage of maturity has been reached in Lutheran-Jewish conversations. It was not very long ago, after all, that doubt was widely expressed as to whether the deep issues of faith could be dealt with at all within such an interreligious setting. Were not these matters too personal, too particular, too burdened with the baggage of our respective histories to be the appropriate subject of a dialogue that envisioned a fresh start in our relations with one another?

It is to the credit of the planners of the Lutheran-Jewish conversations that from the start, they were bold enough to plunge into biblical and theological topics on which the deepest convictions of both sides could come to expression. Many of these topics, however, were ones on which there was so definite a body of conviction on both sides, worked out through centuries and even millennia of discussion, that the spokesmen for the two faith communities could to a large extent serve simply as reporters of the received doctrine on the matter. Perhaps this has been more true for Lutheranism, which has been much more ready to encapsulate its faith in doctrinal or dogmatic form than has Judaism. But with a topic such as the present one we confront a question to which there are no ready-made answers.

Even for Judaism, which has lived now with the memory of the Holocaust for several generations, it can hardly be said that there is a consensus as to its meaning - if the term "meaning" can be applied to so irrational and so tragic an event. Thus its appearance on our agenda here should not be taken as an indication that the time is ripe for a final word to be spoken, but on the contrary, that the time is at hand for a real engagement with the problem to begin. The present paper, therefore, has the character of an essay - being an effort to open up the question, rather than a definitive statement.

Humanity after Auschwitz

Our topic would be easier to deal with if it read, "Speaking of Man after Auschwitz." For I think it is rather clear what must be said about man after the experience of the Holocaust. Let me put it in terms of the thought of one of the lesser figures of the Lutheran Reformation, one Matthias Flacius Illyricus.

Both Lutheran and Calvinistic theology of the sixteenth century, as is well known, held to a very realistic, not to say pessimistic, doctrine of man. But Flacius pushed this anthropological realism too far. Sin, he said, has become man's very nature and substance, and the image of God in man

has become the image of Satan. For this he was condemned by the Lutheran fathers, as may be seen in the First Article of the Formula of Concord of 1577; and this rejection was highly significant in preserving for Lutheranism a higher estimate of man's cultural and historical possibilities than it has sometimes been credited with. (One thinks here particularly of Reinhold Niebuhr's critique of what he calls the "cultural defeatism" of Lutheranism.)

But from the perspective of this age "after Auschwitz" we may have to say that Flacius simply was a man in advance of his time. When he said that the image of God in man had become the image of Satan, he was wrong in applying this to the whole human race. But he had what now must be considered a correct prevision of the depths to which man would fall in the persons of the mass murderers of our own age.

Listen to these words of Elie Wiesel, in which he describes this phenomenon:

It is possible to be born into the upper or middle-class, receive a first-rate education, respect parents and neighbors, visit museums and attend literary gatherings, play a role in public life, and begin one day to massacre men, women, and children, without hesitation and without guilt. It is possible to fire your gun at living targets and nonetheless delight in the cadence of a poem, the composition of a painting. One's spiritual legacy provides no screen, ethical concepts offer no protection. One may torture the son before his father's eyes and still consider oneself a man of culture and religion. And dream of a peaceful sunset over the sea.[1]

That is Satan garbed as an angel of light. And as the reports of the Vietnam atrocities have shown, it is not only in Germany that such things happen, nor is it only by Germans that they are done. If we wish to speak honestly of man as we have come to know him in our time, we dare not forget what we have learned of these demonic depths of human nature.

But what of *God*? That is the question with which we are confronted here today. Very bluntly put, the question is this: How can we believe any longer in a God of love and a God of power, a God who is "king of the universe," when six million Jews - two-thirds of European Jewry - could be slaughtered without the slightest sign of intervention, either from abroad or from above. (I am sure that the suffering inmates of the concentration camps would not have minded whether God worked mediately or immediately to save them - whether by lightening bolts from heaven or by the intervention of the U.S. government or of the papacy. *Neither* occurred.)

The question of theodicy

Here is the problem of theodicy on a cosmic scale. "Theodicy" - Leibnitz is thought to have coined the term, and the word itself contains the essence of our problem: how to reconcile our notion of God, *theos*, with our notion of justice, *diké*. Or: how to justify the ways of God to man.

Put that way, the question sounds blasphemous; who is man that God should justify himself to him? Yet this is a question that is integral to biblical religion itself, from Job to St. Paul. Indeed, the problem of Auschwitz may be said to be *the problem of Job magnified six millionfold*.

It is significant that the profoundest treatment of the problem of evil in the Hebrew Bible is one that is couched in terms of a dramatic narrative about one single individual and his family. It is true also today that the terror and mystery of Auschwitz are brought home to us more by the story of one boy and one family, as told to us autobiographically by Elie Wiesel, than by all the statistics or more generalized conclusions of those who have tried to analyze the problem as a whole. Perhaps this is because the human mind simply finds it impossible to work with both the *intensity* and *extensity* of the problem. Once one has entered to any extent into the suffering of one single individual caught in the nameless terror of the pogroms and the persecutions, the deportations and

the death camps, it is difficult to multiply this, say, by sixtyfold and still retain one's grasp upon the problem. To multiply it by six hundredfold, by six thousandfold, by sixty thousandfold, by six hundred thousandfold, by six millionfold, is impossible. And so one's mind, reeling, returns to the picture of the single individual. We see him then, not only in himself, but as prototypical of the whole number of sufferers.

The figure of Job is pertinent to our inquiry above all for the chief characteristic with which the narrative endows him: his innocence. "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1). It is this which gave the lie to the retributory doctrine represented by Job's friends - the idea that suffering is to be explained as the punishment for sin. Job protests his innocence, and in this he is vindicated, at the conclusion of the drama, by God himself. He does not claim to be wholly sinless; he is, after all, human. But he is in no way chargeable with transgressions of such a magnitude as to account for the suffering that is his. In this he is comparable to the victims of the Holocaust. For it is above all their innocence that is so moving, and so puzzling for a theodicy.

The doctrine of retribution dies hard, however. Note that it can work in two ways: (a) as a warning: "If you sin, you will suffer." This no doubt has some truth and can serve a useful hortatory purpose. But (b) it can also be used as an ex post facto explanation: "Because you are suffering, you must have sinned." Logically, this doesn't make sense. If all A is B, this in no way implies that all B is A. Psychologically, however, the retributory theory makes a great deal of "sense" in that it serves the sadistic impulse to increase the sufferings of others by adding to the suffering a further load of guilt for having brought it on oneself. Alternatively, it can serve masochistically to increase one's own suffering in this way.

The God of judgment

How is God spoken of according to this theory? As a *God of judgment*, or even more, as a *God of vengeance*. The line between judgment and vengeance is this: in both, the suffering is related to antecedent sin; but "judgment" implies some reasonable proportion between the sin and the punishment, while "vengeance" implies a disproportion.

Is it possible to think of the Holocaust as God's judgment upon the Jews, or as his vengeance upon them? One's heart and mind and soul instinctively reject such a thought. Even to mention it is bitter to the tongue. Yet Christians must recognize that for centuries the church promoted just such a theory to explain the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish state. The besieging Romans, it was taught, were God's instrument of judgment upon the Jews for not accepting the Messiah.

It is true that some Jewish thinkers themselves accepted the theory that Israel's suffering and its dispersal by the Romans was to be interpreted as punishment for its sins. That does not make the theory any more correct. Its inadequacies must be clearly exposed. Toward this end, the statement of the Second Vatican Council which lifts from the Jews and Judaism as such the charge of responsibility for the crucifixion makes a great contribution, as do the similar Lutheran statements. But much remains to be done through education among the broad masses of church membership to break the last threads of this guilt-and-punishment theory. This must be done as preventive therapy, lest at any time in the future there is a temptation to apply it once again.

The God of creative purpose

If the doctrine of retribution was the chief theory represented by Job's interlocutors, there was also another theory, a subordinate motif, which we may call the *theory of moral education*. In a word, suffering is good for you! "Behold, happy is the man whom God reproves; therefore despise not the

chastening of the Almighty.... He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear by adversity" (Job 5:17; 36:15). Again, this theory has some truth to it, but only a limited truth. It is a true statement of what a man of faith can make out of his suffering - but only up to a certain point. When his very humanity begins to be destroyed, as was the case in the concentration camps, then it is fruitless to talk of the ennoblement of his character.

In both these instances (the theory of retribution and the theory of moral education) we have a case of the extension of what Robert K. Merton, in another context, called "theories of the middle range" into all-inclusive explanatory principles; and that extension simply is not justified. If it were, it would leave us with the picture of a monstrous God who tortures his creatures in order to perfect them, a cosmic version of the American commander in Vietnam who declared that he had to "destroy the village in order to save it."

It is most interesting to discover that parallels to these two theories represented by Job's interlocutors echo down through the history of Christian thought. A significant volume dealing with this problem is John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love*.[2] Consulting Hick's analysis, we find that he distinguishes between two major theories of evil (which is to say, two major types of theodicy) in Christian thought. The first he denominates the Augustinian theory, and the second the Irenaean, after the second century church father Irenaeus.

The Augustinian view is oriented to the categories of sin and punishment. The existence of suffering and evil in the world is attributable to the fall, i.e., to the fault of men. The Irenaean view, in contrast, looks not to the past but to the future for its explanation. It "finds the justification for evil in an infinite (because eternal) good which God is bringing out of the temporal process."[3] Life is a vale of soul-making, and all will eventually be to the good. Hick offers the following contrast between the two points of view:

Instead of the [Augustinian] doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker. . . . Instead of the Augustinian view of life's trials as a divine punishment for Adam's sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil, as a divinely appointed environment for man's development ....[4]

Irenaeus's own words convey this "optimistic view" quite graphically:

How, if we had no knowledge of the contrary, could we have had instruction in that which is good? . . . For just as the tongue receives experience of sweet and bitter by means of tasting, and the eye discriminates between black and white by means of vision . . . so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God.[5]

A very interesting theory, but in no way sufficient as an explanation of the Holocaust.

The God of mystery

Those who are acquainted with the thought of Teilhard de Chardin will recognize that he stands within this Irenaean tradition. All of life tends toward the Omega Point, and is justified in its partial value by that total fulfillment toward which all things move. An inspiring cosmic vision - but one that is only able to deal with the tragedies along the way by, in effect, minimizing them. Teilhard has been widely criticized for being unable to interpret in terms of his cosmic evolutionary theory the tragic events of the twentieth century, which seem to have thrown into reverse what might have appeared to the nineteenth century as human progress.

If the first theory speaks of God as *the God of judgment*, the second speaks of God as *the God of creative purpose*. But neither is adequate to explain, much less to justify, Auschwitz. Neither, in fact, was found adequate by Job to explain his own suffering. The only answer Job receives is the theophany: an experience of the overwhelming majesty and awfulness of God. In this sense, the answer to Job's question is that there is no answer: I am God and you are man; and the fact that you are man is reflected precisely in the fact that you cannot comprehend my ways. Job bows to the dust, in humility and faith.

What does this mean for our speaking about God? It means that we speak of God as *the God of mystery*; that we acknowledge the inscrutability of God.

If we return to John Hick's analysis for a moment, we find that although he adopts, on the whole, the Irenaean viewpoint that the sufferings of this present time are justified by their eventual result, it is precisely the Holocaust which he acknowledges cannot be fit within this context of explanation. He has to allow it to remain as a surd, as something unexplainable.

It is to be noted as a grievous failing of Hick's whole study that in a four hundred page volume on "Evil and the God of Love," published in 1966, he does not refer to the Holocaust until page 397! His discussion up to this point is altogether too much in the domain of the personal, the psychological, and the metaphysical rather than the historical and the political realms. If he had taken this greatest example of the upsurge of evil in modem times into account earlier in his analysis, it might have affected the whole result; it might have destroyed the relative optimism of his Irenaean viewpoint.

Nevertheless, when he does refer to the Holocaust, he does not balk at describing it for what it is. Hick has been describing the way in which we are helped to bear our own suffering when we understand it within the context of God's ultimate loving purpose. "What, however," he asks, "of the sins and sufferings of others?" And he continues:

When we ask such a question today we almost inevitably think of the Nazi programme for the extermination of the Jewish people, with all the brutality and bestial cruelty that it involved and evoked. What does that ultimate purpose of divine purpose and activity mean for Auschwitz and Belsen and the other camps in which, between 1942 and 1945, between four and six million Jewish men, women, and children were deliberately and scientifically murdered? Was this in any sense willed by God?

The answer is obviously no. These events were utterly evil, wicked, devilish and, so far as the human mind can reach, unforgiveable; they are wrongs that can never be righted, horrors which will disfigure the universe to the end of time, and in relation to which no condemnation can be strong enough, no revulsion adequate. . . . Most certainly God did not want those who committed these fearful crimes against humanity to act as they did. His purpose for the world was retarded by them and the power of evil within it increased.[6]

Thus Hick can offer no explanation for the Holocaust. The most he can offer is a word of hope and consolation regarding the individuals who were caught up in it. His words to this effect are worth a further extended quotation.

Our Christian awareness of the universal divine purpose and activity does, however, affect our

reaction even to these events. First, as regards the millions of men, women, and children who perished in the extermination programme, it gives the assurance that God's purpose for each individual has not been defeated by the efforts of wicked men. In the realms beyond our world they are alive and will have their place in the final fulfillment of God's creation. The transforming importance of the Christian hope of eternal life - not only for oneself but for all men - has already been stressed above, and is vitally relevant here.

Secondly within the situation itself, the example of Christ's self-giving love for others should have led Christians to be willing to risk their own lives to help the escape of the threatened victims; and here the record is partly good but also, unhappily, in too large part bad. And third, a Christian faith should neutralize the impulse to meet hatred and cruelty with an answering hatred and cruelty. . . . Such a renouncing of the satisfaction of vengeance may be made possible to our sinful hearts by the knowledge that the inevitable reaction of a moral universe upon cruelty will be met, within this life or beyond it, without our aid. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."[7]

Thus Hick has recourse to a doctrine of eschatological reward and retribution, and he ends, as we began, with a reference to the God of vengeance; now, however, not of vengeance upon the Jews, but upon their oppressors.

Without entering into a discussion of that motif as such, let us observe once more that in this major effort at a theodicy by a contemporary Christian theologian, he cannot comprehend the Holocaust within his framework of explanation. We are thus left to speak of God, so far as his relation to this event is concerned, in terms of mystery. Like Job, we bow in awe before his inscrutability.

There is a category in Lutheran theology which is intended as an acknowledgment of this mystery, this inscrutability. This is the notion of the *Deus absconditus* - the hidden God. Luther derived the phrase from the Latin of Isa. 45:15: *Vere, tu es Deus absconditus*. "Truly, thou art a God that hidest thyself."

For Luther, the will of God is not evident in the ordinary course of world events. His will is known only where he chooses to make it known; only in revelatory moments, not in life as a whole. We live by those moments, but in so doing, we walk by faith, not by sight. And faith is usually contrary to experience.

We spoke of the *Deus absconditus* as a category in Lutheran thought. It is more than a category: it is the background or undertone of all that is said in this theology. It was Miguel de Unamuno, I believe, who coined the phrase "the tragic sense of life"; but we may say that Luther, above all other theologians, possessed this tragic sense. All his assertions of faith, of courage, and of victory were rooted in what one Luther interpreter has called "the grand nevertheless." *Trotzdem* - in spite of all - I will believe!

The finite God

Let us recapitulate the discussion thus far. The problem of Auschwitz, like the problem of evil as such, is the problem of how such things can happen if God is both good and powerful. If he is not good, then he looks upon these matters with indifference or even, if this is conceivable, with delight. But such a God would in no way be the God we worship. Luther suggests that the very word *Gott* ("God") is rooted in the concept of *Gut* ("good"). *Gut* and *Gott*: the two cannot be torn

apart, or all that we know as Christian or Jewish faith would turn into its opposite. If the goodness of God is not to be given up, if he is truly all-loving and at the same time all-powerful, then Auschwitz cannot be explained. It remains in the domain of mystery. It is not surprising, therefore, that attention has been paid to the other pole of the equation, and it has been asked, Is God id fact all-powerful, or in what sense is he all-powerful?

We enter here upon a realm of theological questions which we can in no way treat adequately within the framework of the present paper. We can only briefly pass in review some of the major forms which reflection about this question has taken - the question being that of the nature and limits of God's power or of the exercise thereof.

The first is the conception of a *finite God*. This is a notion which, needless to say, has never found residence in any body of official Christian teaching. The idea no doubt has a long history. In American theology, its chief spokesman, in fact its sole spokesman of any prominence, was Professor Edgar Sheffield Brightman of Boston University. Brightman posited an element which he called "the Given," with which God himself has to deal, either using it as an instrument or, if that is impossible, acknowledging it as an obstacle.

The Given consists of the eternal uncreated laws of reason and also of equally eternal and uncreated processes of nonrational consciousness, . . . disorderly impulses and desires, such experiences as pain and suffering, the forms of space and time, And whatever in God is the source of surd evil.[8]

The last sentence is significant. By "surd evil" Brightman means evil that is *not* explainable as the means to a greater good. He speaks of this as having its source "in God"; yet it constitutes for God a limit upon his own nature, a limit upon his will to love.

Brightman's view, as we have already indicated, has found little if any acceptance. I mention it precisely because it is so little known, and yet so precisely directed to our problem.

The self-limited God

The second view of which we must take note speaks not of a finite God, but of a *self-limited God*. Unlike Brightman's conception, this one has a long and venerable history in Christian thought, and indeed in Jewish thought as well. I am speaking of God's self-limitation simply in this sense: in that he has created a world with two interrelated characteristics - freedom and lawfulness. Man is free: free to choose good or evil. But nature is bound, bound to act in accordance with cause and effect. Thus man is free to conceive and to construct the gas chambers at Auschwitz. And when the handle is turned, gas will flow through the nozzle. God is powerless, unless he wishes to contravene either human freedom or physical natural law. And this he does not wish to do.

Involved here is the whole question of grace and free will, of providence and predestination, indeed a whole metaphysic and a whole theology. My purpose here is simply to suggest that the problem of "speaking of God after Auschwitz" can hardly be dealt with apart from this range of considerations. It is a question that goes to the heart of our conception of God and man, and of their relations one to the other.

Speaking quite personally, I should have to say this: that in an intellectual sense, this solution (that of a self-limiting God) may be satisfying; but in a religious sense, and in a moral sense, it is not. For when the horrors grow so extreme as was the case in Auschwitz, then one's conscience cries out for God, if necessary, to put an end to history itself to stop the slaughter.

Yet, on further reflection, we may not really wish that. When we consider the relative

meaningfulness of our own lives despite the pall of sadness from such horrors as the Holocaust, and when we consider the resurrection of Israel itself after the catastrophe - that is, the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland and their rebirth as a nation - we realize that we would *not* have wanted history to stop at some point in the early 1940s. And so we sympathize, if one may say so, with the dilemma in which God found himself, and in which he continually finds himself, confronted with a world which he has chosen to endow with mixed characteristics of freedom and lawfulness.

The embattled God

We have spoken of the finite God and the self-limited God. The third conception is that of *the embattled God*. I am speaking here of views that posit a demonic force that struggles against the divine. Paul Tillich may be credited with reintroducing the concept of the demonic into contemporary theology. It represents a demythologized version of the traditional notion of the devil, or Satan. There is no personal devil, but the demonic is terribly real. It consists in what Tillich has called "structures of destruction" - forces, trends, powers, irrational movements and instances of mass hysteria, all leading to the awful possibility of the pursuit of evil simply for evil's sake.

The rediscovery of this factor was not in the first instance an intellectual event; it was a historical event, based on the outcropping in the twentieth century of the dark underground of human history. Paul Tillich had the prescience to articulate this concept already in the 1920s, on the basis both of his experience in the First World War, and of his long-term analysis of trends in modern life and thought that were to coalesce in the phenomenon of Nazism, and that had already begun to gain momentum in that very decade. His estimate of Nazism and his struggle against it were very clear, so much so that when the Nazis assumed power in 1933, the name of Paul Tillich was on the very first list of university professors to be dismissed from their posts.

The rediscovery of the demonic has had a tremendous impact on our image of man, since it is through man that the demonic works. But it also has an impact on our concept of God: It causes us to think of God as an embattled God, still struggling against the powers of evil in the world. Among Lutheran theologians, Gustaf Aulén has been prominent among those giving voice to this conception. He was professor of theology at the University of Lund and later a bishop of the Church of Sweden.

Aulén, in his book *Christus Victor*[9] and in his systematic theology, has set forth a dualistic-dramatic theory of the atonement. It is dualistic in that it posits a radical opposition between God and the powers of evil. It is dramatic in that it sees this opposition as working itself out on the stage of history in terms of the concrete clash between destructive and constructive powers. It is a theory of the atonement in that it posits a decisive significance for the event of Christ, seeing in his crucifixion and resurrection the decisive battle in this warfare between the divine and the demonic.

Aulén and others in the period after the Second World War used to employ the following illustration. Our present situation in history, they said, after the resurrection and before the parousia - that is, between the "first" and "second" comings - is like the situation of occupied Europe when the successful Allied invasion of Normandy was announced. The people of occupied Europe knew at that point that their liberation was at hand. Indeed, the victory had already begun, and even though setbacks might yet occur, the final triumph of the Allied cause was certain. So it is, said these Christian theologians, in the interim between the advent of the Messiah and the total victory of his kingdom. We live between D-Day and V-Day.

This theory, it may be pointed out, can be read in either of two ways. It is like the proverbial half-full glass of water, which may equally well be viewed as half-empty. On the one hand, there is a note of confidence in what God has done. On the other hand, there is a very sober realism about the battles that may yet lie ahead. To speak in this way of God is to speak of an embattled God. But

that is perhaps to accentuate the negative. Let us speak more positively and biblically, with a slight turn of the phrase, by speaking rather of a "God of battles."

The suffering God

We have reviewed three "solutions" to our problem which left the divine sovereignty unimpaired, but thereby failed to answer the question of how the reality of God and the fact of Auschwitz can be held together. These were the sin-and-punishment theory, the character-education theory, and the theory that declines to answer the question, leaving the matter in the realm of mystery. Then we surveyed three positions which in some way do qualify God's sovereignty, at least with respect to the present age. These were the theories of the finite God, the self-limited God, and the embattled God.

With all this, however, we still have not spoken of God in the way that corresponds most closely to the nature of the problem, and that corresponds too to the deepest insights of the Christian - and also, I believe, of the Jewish - faith. This is to speak of the *suffering God*.

Abraham Joshua Heschel taught us to speak of the "divine pathos." He reminded us of how different is the Greek concept of God dwelling alone in *apatheia* ("without feeling"), or "thinking on thinking," from the Hebraic conception of a living and active God who is vitally concerned with the affairs of men. Heschel urged us not to be afraid to speak of God - not anthropomorphically to be sure - but "anthropopathically." God too knows wrath and love and jealousy and joy, according to the Bible. If the danger of this line of thinking is God's humanization, even worse, said Heschel, would be his anaesthetization.

Above all it is Jeremiah, according to Heschel's study of the prophets, who taught us of God's involvement in the sufferings of men. It is intriguing to note that precisely the same point is made by the Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori in his book *Theology of the Pain of God*. This work, published in English translation in 1965,[10] is believed to be the first work of Christian theology ever translated from Japanese into English, rather than the other way around. Kitamori writes:

It is said that Isaiah saw God's holiness, Hosea saw God's love, and Amos saw God's righteousness. We wish to add that Jeremiah saw God's pain ....[11]

This is a pain, says Kitamori, which is at the same time God's love.

This is for me, religiously, the solution to the problem. God participates in the sufferings of men, and man is called to participate in the sufferings of God. Perhaps it is the only adequate solution intellectually as well. It was the German philosopher Friedrich Schelling who said in his book *Of Human Freedom*, that "all of history is virtually an enigma without a concept of an agonizing God." That, I think, is a memorable statement.[12]

For Christianity, the symbol of the agonizing God is the cross of Christ. I think that it is tragic that this symbol should have become a symbol of division between Jews and Christians, for the reality to which it points is a Jewish reality as well. I mean the reality of suffering and martyrdom.

The cross is not the instrument upon which the Jews put Jesus or anyone else to death; it was the Roman overlords who did so. Rather, the cross was the instrument upon which Jews were put to death. And this long antedates the time of Jesus. According to Josephus, Cyrus introduced into his edict for the return of the Jews from Babylon the threat of crucifixion for any who interfered with the execution of his edict. Darius the Persian threatened this death to those who refused obedience to his decrees. Antiochus Epiphanes crucified faithful Jews who would not abandon their religion at his bidding. And after the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, Titus crucified so many Jews that,

says Josephus, "there was not enough room for the crosses, nor enough crosses for the condemned."[13]

The cross thus refers in the first instance to a *Jewish* reality: to the reality of suffering, all too well known to this people, from the time when they cried out in their affliction under Pharaoh, down to the time of their yet more unspeakable sufferings under the modern Pharaoh. The further interpretations which Christians give to the cross of Christ are well known, but what I wish to do is to point us back behind the interpretations to the reality of this man who suffered as a Jew, and on the basis of whose sufferings the Christian should be the first to identify with the sufferings of any Jews.

The fact that this has not been the case, and that the cross has been the symbol not of identification but of inquisition, is a matter for the deepest shame on the part of Christianity. One thing is clear as to how we may speak of God after Auschwitz. We may not speak, and we cannot speak, in terms of any kind of triumphalism. We can speak only in repentance. A God who suffers is the opposite of a God of triumphalism. We can speak of God after Auschwitz only as the one who calls us to a new unity as beloved brothers - not only between Jews and Christians, but especially between them.

At an interfaith service held at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago on May 29, 1973, to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, a prayer was offered which expresses very well this spirit of repentance and renewal. It was said antiphonally between the leader and the congregation:

With those who grade any people as "superior" or "inferior" . . .

We share the guilt, O Lord.

With those who would "solve" any problem by destroying a group . . .

We share the guilt, O Lord.

With those who pretend not to know what a leader who traffics in fear and hatred will do . . .

We share the guilt, O Lord.

With those who exult when their group does what they individually would be ashamed to do . . .

We share the guilt, O Lord.

With those who wait until defeat to condemn what they accept in victory . . .

We share the guilt, O Lord.

We share the guilt, and ask your help, O Lord . . .

To stand today against what we condemned a generation ago.

We share the guilt, and ask your help, O Lord . . .

To stand in our own country against what we condemn in another

We share the guilt, and ask your help, 0 Lord . . .

To know that what all evil persons have done, we too could do.

We share the guilt, and ask your help, O Lord . . .

To know that what all good and brave persons have done, we too could do.

We share the guilt . . .

And the glory, O Lord.

In the Holocaust . . .

May the I-who-am-opposed-to-you be consumed.

From the ashes of the Holocaust . . .

May the I-who-am-with-you arise.[14]

We have surveyed various aspects of the question of "Speaking of God after the Holocaust." Perhaps much of this speculation has been futile. In conclusion, we may refer to Karl Marx's famous remark in the last of his "Theses on Feuerbach." "The philosophers," he said, "have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."

It may be questioned whether it is proper at all to employ God as an explanatory hypothesis, as some of the thinkers whom we have surveyed have done. God is not in the first instance an explanatory hypothesis; he is an impelling force. The very best way to speak of God after Auschwitz, therefore, is to speak of him in such a way that men are moved to see to it that such a

thing never happens again. Unfortunately, in a world in which human freedom and human perversity are both very real, we cannot say that it *could* not happen. Therefore we say that it *must* not happen.

We have treated the problem of the Holocaust, as our topic demanded, in terms of the problem of God. But we need to return from this ultimate level of the question to the proximate level, on which the phenomenon of the Holocaust will be treated in terms of its more immediate historical causes. That is a task, however, not for one or two brief sessions of a conference, but for an ongoing inquiry that, despite all the work that has already been done, will require yet more years and decades until the significance of this event is really understood. Let us as Jews and Christians dedicate ourselves to joint participation in that ongoing task.

Notes

1. Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After*, tr. Lily Edelman and the author (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 10. Copyright © 1970 by Random House, Inc. Reprinted by permission.
2. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).
3. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 263.
4. *Ibid*., pp. 220 ff.
5. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.1. Quoted by Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 220.
6. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 397.
7. Ibid., pp. 397 f.
8. Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 337.
9. Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).
10. Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965).
11. *Ibid*., p. 161.
12. This wording is taken from the English version of Kitamori's book, and is presumably a translation of the Japanese translation of Schelling. The reference is to *Of Human Freedom*, p. 403 of the German original; in the English translation by James Gutmann (Chicago: Open Court, 1936), it reads: "All history remains incomprehensible without the concept of a humanly suffering God."
13. Josephus, *The Jewish War* 5.11.2.451. Quoted by Maurice Goguel, *The Life of Jesus*, tr. Olive Wyon (London: Allen & Unwin, 1933), p. 534.
14. The author of this litany is Robert Blakely.

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Paul D. Opsahl and Marc H. Tanenbaum, editors, *Speaking of God Today: Jews and Lutherans in Conversation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974. Pages 144-159.