



## Powerlessness of God? A Critical Appraisal of Hans Jonas's Idea of God after Auschwitz

| Henrix, Hans Hermann

**How can we still speak of a powerful and loving God after Auschwitz? Hans Jonas (1903-1993) dealt with this question from a Jewish point of view in his famous essay 'The Idea of God after Auschwitz.' A Christian theologian here discusses Jonas' provocative notion of a 'self-limiting God.'**

### Powerlessness of God?

#### A Critical Appraisal of Hans Jonas's Idea of God after Auschwitz

Hans Hermann Henrix

##### I. On the truth of authentic and fictional texts

Among the Jewish contributions that echo the abysmal terror of Auschwitz and express the horror of the *Shoah*, many touching and authentic reports are found. To those who are driven by the question of how, in the face of the reality of Auschwitz, we can think and talk about God at all, texts exploring the existence and the perception of God in view of the events of the Shoah take on a definitive importance for their life and faith. One person's heart and mind may have been indelibly branded by Elie Wiesel's story in which the boy Pipel, during his protracted death at the gallows on the Auschwitz roll-call square, asks "Where is God?"<sup>1</sup> Another may turn again to a text such as "Jossel Son of Jossel Rackower of Tarnopol Talks to God," that "beautiful and true text, as true as only fiction can be," presented as a document reporting on the final hours of resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>2</sup>

A third person, fearing perhaps to be touched too closely by such fictional witnesses to the struggle for God and looking instead to the theoretical/intellectual debate, may turn to Emil Fackenheim's "commanding voice of Auschwitz"<sup>3</sup> – a text that, by keeping an equilibrium between theodicy and anthropodicy, wants to transmit to the Jewish people the call issuing from Auschwitz for a new, eleventh commandment: namely, to protect and maintain the Jewish people and the Jewish faith, so as not to give Hitler a posthumous victory.

##### II. Hans Jonas – a Jewish voice in dark times

Does "The Idea of God After Auschwitz" by Hans Jonas (1903-1993)<sup>4</sup> also belong among these texts? The author understands his contribution to be "a Jewish voice in dark times." Not mincing words, he calls his lecture "a piece of undisguisedly speculative theology." (p.7) It is theology in the garb of a theodicy, and theodicy not so much as a question but as an answer, an answer that seems to exonerate God from being responsible for the evil in the world, and thus for Auschwitz. Maybe it is this character of his contribution that has attracted considerable appreciation for Hans Jonas's lecture within German-language Christian theology and philosophy<sup>5</sup> – a kind of attention that Christian theology has only very hesitantly given to the other Jewish voices mentioned.<sup>6</sup> What then is special about his "idea of God after Auschwitz"?

Anyone who approaches Hans Jonas's thought by way of his works on the philosophy of nature and technology as well as on ethics<sup>7</sup> would not in the first instance expect to find an interest in theology and the history of religion, since his philosophical work seems to breathe a pronounced scepticism in respect of the idea of God, which he considers in the context of modern nihilism. His ethics has a causal horizon that does not seem to have a place for God.<sup>8</sup> And yet, the God-question has never let go of him. This became apparent to the German-speaking public when in his expression of thanks on receiving the Dr. Leopold Lucas Award from the Faculty of Protestant Theology at Tübingen University in 1984, he chose to speak on the "The Idea of God After Auschwitz," a line of thought that he presented again later that year before a large audience at the Munich Assembly of German Catholics. During the final years of his life, he frequently revisited the tension between the nihilistic scepticism in his philosophical works on the one hand and his continued interest in the question of God on the other.<sup>9</sup>

The theme for his Tübingen speech of thanks "pressed" itself on him "irresistibly" because Jonas's mother and the mother of the donor of the award had shared the fate of being murdered at Auschwitz. He chose the topic in "fear and trembling," since it had existential depth: "I believe I owed it to those shadows, not to deny them some sort of answer to their long faded-away cries to a mute God" (7). The screams of the murdered souls still echo in the lament of the survivor, expressed in the phrase "a mute God." Hans Jonas's answer to the faded-away cries of the murdered drives a profoundly human and existential wedge into the philosophical/theological rock face. This context of real-life history must be kept in mind whenever his deliberations take on a speculative hue that might seem to be removed from everything human.

"What is it that Auschwitz has added to the measure of the fearsome and horrible misdeeds that human beings could perpetrate on other human beings, and ever have perpetrated?" (10) This is the question that Auschwitz has provoked in Hans Jonas. He answers it in an indirect manner, by explaining that traditional answers do not apply to the question of God any longer. The idea of the Shoah as something that God has visited on the disloyal people of the covenant is of no more help to him in explaining the Shoah than the idea, first formulated in the age of the Maccabees, of the witness of the suffering one, the martyr, who by his sacrifice and the giving of his life strengthens the promise of redemption by the coming Messiah. In accordance with this, even the "sanctifying of the name" (*kiddush-hashem*) in medieval martyr-piety is not longer of any use. "Auschwitz, devouring even the innocent children, knew nothing of all this.... Not a trace of human nobility was left to those who were destined to undergo the "final solution," not a trace of it was recognizable in the figures of those ghostly skeletons who survived long enough to see the camp liberated" (12f.). For Jews, who consider this life the arena of God's creation, revelation, and redemption, God is the guardian of this arena, the Lord of history. Thus Auschwitz, to the believing Jew, calls into question "the entire traditional idea of God." It adds to the Jewish notion of history "a new dimension that has never existed before, something that the inherited theological categories cannot cope with" (14). This is the preface, the prologue to the credo of Hans Jonas, who does not want to give up the idea of God. He can also express the preliminary sketch of his credo, which despite everything still reckons with the existence of God, in another way:

"The notion of 'the Lord of history' will have to be given up" – this is the anticipated outcome of his credo (14). By employing the twin perspectives of theology and philosophy of religion, Jonas asks, as it were, under what conditions a history could be possible in which something like Auschwitz could happen. From his point of view, a God ruling history and interfering in its course of events "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" is not one of the conditions of possibility of a history containing the fact of the Shoah. Jonas sees the relationship of God to history in a different light. To think of God in view of Auschwitz means to him that we already have to think differently of God the Creator. This notion of God the Creator Jonas proceeds to delineate in a way "that makes it possible to articulate the experience of Auschwitz in a theological sense."<sup>10</sup> In order to develop the idea of God on a transcendental level, Hans Jonas turns to a "self-conceived myth." (15)

### III. Hans Jonas's self-conceived myth and its theological significance

*In the beginning, for unknowable reasons, the ground of being, or the divine, chose to give itself over to the chance and risk and endless variety of becoming. And wholly so: entering into the adventure of space and time, the deity held back nothing of itself – no uncommitted or unimpaired part remained to direct, correct, and ultimately guarantee the roundabout working out of its destiny in the creation. On this unconditional immanence the modern temper insists. It is its courage or despair, in any case its bitter honesty, to take our being-in-the-world seriously: to view the world as left to itself, its laws as brooking no interference, and the rigour of our belonging to it as not softened by an extramundane providence. Our myth demands the same for God's being-in-the-world. Not, however, in the sense of a pantheistic immanence.... But rather, in order that the world might be, and be for itself, God renounced his own being, divesting himself of his deity – to receive it back from the Odyssey of time laden with the chance harvest of unforeseeable temporal experience; transfigured, or possibly even disfigured, by it. In such self-forfeiture of divine integrity for the sake of an unprejudiced becoming, no other foreknowledge can be admitted than that of possibilities which cosmic being offers in its own terms. To these conditions God committed his cause, effacing himself for the sake of the world. (15-17)*

Jonas traces the fate of God's effacing himself into the world through the course of time. He conceives of this course of time in an evolutionary manner. In the aeons before life begins to stir, the world does not yet harbour any danger to the God abandoning himself to it. This danger only begins to accrue when biological evolution becomes ever more multifarious and intensive: Eternity gathers strength, "filling little by little with the contents of self-affirmation, and for the first time now the awakening God can say that the creation is good" (18). Along with life, however, there arose death; mortality thus became the price to pay for a higher kind of existence, which out of the momentum of its evolutionary development produces the human being. The arrival of the human being also has its price, that is to say, God will have to pay the price now for his cause "possibly going wrong" (20), as the innocence of life now "has given way to the task of responsibility under the disjunction of good and evil. To the promise and risk of this agency, the divine cause, revealed at last, henceforth finds itself committed: and its issue trembles in the balance. The image of God ... passes into the precarious trust of human beings, to be completed, saved, or spoiled by what they will do to themselves and the world." (23) God's fate is accomplished within a context of worrying and hopeful observing, accompanying, and tracking human activities, or rather, as Jonas himself puts it: Transcendence "from now on accompanies (human) actions with baited breath, hoping and wooing, rejoicing and sorrowing, with satisfaction and disappointment, and, as I would like to believe, making itself felt to humanity, without however intervening in the dynamics of that scene of mundane activities." (23f.)

Hans Jonas's myth has originality, rhetorical power, and speculative strength. His preferred means of expression is imagery. We at once begin to notice the wealth of consequences for the traditionally accepted notion of God arising from this scheme. As he himself admits, Jonas became aware of this only gradually. And he feels himself obliged to "link" his scheme "in a responsible way with the tradition of Jewish religious thought." (24)

His myth speaks implicitly of a suffering God as well as a developing and a caring God. The biblical "idea of divine majesty" (26) only at first sight contradicts the notion of the suffering God, for the Hebrew Bible is certainly capable of describing quite eloquently the grief, remorse, and disappointment God experiences with regard to humans and in particular with regard to his chosen people. The thought of a becoming God may run counter to the idea emanating from classical Greek philosophy and introduced into the theological teaching of the attributes and its claim of the unchangeability of God; but as far as Jonas is concerned, it is inherent "in the sheer fact" that God "is affected by what happens in the world, and that 'being affected' means being altered, being in a changed situation. So that if in fact God has any kind of relationship to the world ... then by virtue

of this alone, the Eternal has become "temporized" (28f.). The notion of a caring God then defines more closely this "temporization" of God: "That God takes care of and cares for his creatures belongs among the most familiar tenets of Jewish faith" (31).<sup>11</sup>

Up to this point Hans Jonas considers his myth compatible with the Jewish theological tradition. He admits to incompatibility with it, though, at the point where he feels compelled to negate God's omnipotence. "In our speculative venture, the most critical point is reached when we have to say: He is not an omnipotent God! For the sake of our image of God and our whole relationship to the divine, we cannot maintain the time-honored (medieval) doctrine of absolute, unlimited divine power" (33). His negation of divine omnipotence at this early stage, before coming to the problem of Auschwitz, Jonas derives from problems inherent in the concept of omnipotence. Thus he argues on the level of logical thought that omnipotence, as "absolute auto-potency," in its solitude was in no position to exert power on anything. It was a power without resistance, and hence without power (33f.). Theologically, he formulates it as follows: "We can have divine omnipotence together with divine goodness only at the price of complete divine inscrutability.... More generally speaking, the three attributes ... absolute goodness, absolute power, and understandability, stand in such a relationship that any combination of two of them excludes the third."<sup>12</sup>

To deny the qualities of goodness and understandability to God would mean to destroy his divinity and to state an idea of God quite unacceptable "according to Jewish norms." Therefore the notion of omnipotence, already seen to be dubious, must be relinquished.

Doing away with the omnipotence of God could however, Jonas believes, still be expressed theologically "within the continuity of the Jewish heritage," for this limitation of divine power might be interpreted as "a concession made by God ... which he could revoke whenever he felt like it." (40) Here we have the idea of a self-chosen, retractable limitation of God's power. This self-limitation of God, however, does not satisfy Jonas, for it would leave incomprehensible what has actually happened in history. Auschwitz would not have been confronted theologically; God would be conceived of without taking Auschwitz into account. For in Jonas's view a freely chosen self-limitation of God with regard to his own power that could be revoked at any time would allow us "to expect that the good Lord might now and again break his self-imposed rule of exercising extreme restraint in imposing his power, and might intervene with a miraculous rescue. But no such miracle occurred; throughout the years of the Auschwitz slaughter, God remained silent. The miracles that occurred were the work of human beings alone: the acts of bravery of those individual, mostly nameless "righteous among the nations" who did not shrink from even the ultimate sacrifice to rescue others, to relieve their suffering, and even, if there was no alternative, to share in the fate of Israel. ... But God remained silent. At this point I say: He did not interfere not because he did not wish to, but because he was not able to." (41f.)

Jonas now can simultaneously think of Auschwitz and God only at the price of foregoing talk of a God with "a strong hand and an outstretched arm." In view of Auschwitz, one must posit "the powerlessness of God" with regard to physical events. God, however, not only opts for this powerlessness in the course of history, but wills it into creation itself. Already creation out of nothing was by itself an act of self-restriction, "a self-limitation that allows for the existence and autonomy of a world. Creation itself was the act of an absolute sovereignty that for the sake of the existence of self-determined finiteness agreed no longer to be absolute." (45)

Jonas finds a clue for his speculative venture of formulating his concept of God and the Creator in this manner in the "highly original and quite unorthodox speculations" of the Jewish Kabbalah surrounding the idea of *zimzum*. The divine *zimzum* as a form of "contraction, a retreat, a form of self-imposed moderation" is a precondition for the creation of the world. "In order to create space for the world to exist ... the Eternal One had to withdraw into himself, thus creating emptiness, the void in which and from which he could create the world. Without this withdrawal into himself there could be nothing else outside of God." (46)<sup>13</sup>

Jonas is able to support his myth of God renouncing his power with reference to the medieval idea of *zimzum*, while at the same time revising it. In *zimzum*, as the Kabbalah understands it, God retains his sovereignty vis-à-vis a creation that has become possible. In this context he remains a sovereign counterpart to the world; his contraction and withdrawal is only partial. Jonas, however, postulates a total contraction, a contraction not towards a void, but towards an unconditional immanence (cf. 16): Infinity in terms of its power empties itself "as a whole into finiteness" and in this way hands itself over to the latter." (46) God retains nothing that remains untouched and immune (cf.16). This, however, raises the question: "Does this leave any room for a relationship to God?" Transcendence seems entirely steeped in and dissolved into immanence. Whether transcendence emerges once more from immanence is, paradoxically enough, up to the decision of human beings. For this is the sense in which Hans Jonas answers the question he himself has raised: "Having given himself wholly to the becoming world, God has no more to give, it is our turn now to give to him." This is what humans do, whenever they take care that God must not regret having created the world. Hans Jonas is of the opinion that "this could well be the secret of the unknown "thirty-six righteous ones" who, according to Jewish teaching, the world will never be without, in order to safeguard its continued existence." (47)<sup>14</sup> Jonas counts on the possibility that further "righteous ones" have existed even "in our times," and so in Auschwitz as well; in this context he remembers "the righteous among the nations" whom he has mentioned before, who in the abyss of the Shoah gave their lives for Israel. In the thirty-six righteous ones, a transcendence wholly hidden in immanence manifests itself as "holiness," a holiness that "is capable of offsetting immeasurable guilt, of settling the debt run up by a whole generation, and of saving the peace of the invisible realm."(48) Auschwitz, in Jonas's thought, is the place where the notion of a God who has restricted himself fails; it is also the place where, from the ashes of this failed notion of God, God's inscrutable transcendence appears in the form of holiness in the figures of the righteous one. Here his self-conceived myth is transformed into existential thought.

#### IV. An appraisal of Hans Jonas's understanding of God

The myth Hans Jonas has created is a moving and challenging proposal. He weighs the traditional manner of speaking of God. In the face of the Shoah he wishes to speak of God. And he does this with pointed reference to the modern problematic of theodicy: any talk of God's kindness and omnipotence is tested in the face of Auschwitz and in relation to the demand for understandability in God. The understandability of God is a guiding principle for Jonas. It is in the face of this criterion that talk of God has to prove itself. This is where it has its forensic element, based on reason.<sup>15</sup> Although Jonas does not demand a thoroughgoing intelligibility, he nevertheless insists on the requirement "that we be able to understand God, not entirely of course, but to some extent.... If God, however, is to be understandable (in certain ways and to a certain extent) – and this is something we must adhere to – then his goodness must be compatible with the existence of evil, which it can only be if he is not omnipotent." (38f.)

Jonas finds his principle of understandability quite centrally anchored in Jewish tradition: "a *deus absconditus*, a hidden God (not to speak of an absurd God), is a deeply un-Jewish notion." (38) That this is somewhat controversial, however, within Jewish thought, is evident in any understanding of Jewish faith that orients itself to the testing of Abraham, i.e. God's demand that he sacrifice his son Isaac. Thus Michael Wyschogrod can state that "Jewish belief ... from the very beginning is a belief that God can do what is incomprehensible in human terms," and with a view to Auschwitz he adds: "In our day and age this includes the belief that despite Auschwitz, God will fulfil his promise to redeem Israel and the world. Am I able to grasp how this is possible? No."<sup>16</sup>

This Jewish position refuses to accept the modern variant of theodicy, since it does not consider valid a judging of God-talk before the tribunal of reason. Jonas, however, following his basic principle of understandability, opts for a discourse within the context of the modern problem of theodicy. For what he has to say, he is quite well able to find the appropriate Jewish words,<sup>17</sup> and

is capable also of transmitting his ideas in the traditional categories of Jewish thought, even though he describes them as "self-invented" (15), that is to say, developed in his own name and at his own risk. He is well aware of this. And by his own acknowledgment, he deviates "rather decisively from the most ancient Jewish teaching" (42).<sup>18</sup> Does that mean, then, that he finds himself even more removed from Christian teaching? The Christian reader should not be too quick to jump to conclusions on this point. Rather, such a reader is left with an ambiguous impression of closeness and difference at the same time. One is tempted to associate the impression of closeness with what Hans Urs von Balthasar calls "formal Christology"<sup>19</sup>, whereas the difference may consist in his theodicy being a "Christology without Christ."

As to associating Jonas's myth with the term "formal Christology," one finds a basis for this in his own writings. More than twenty years before his Tübingen word of thanks, Jonas had outlined his myth for the first time in a lecture on "Immortality and Our Contemporary Existence"<sup>20</sup> and had submitted this idea to his teacher and colleague Rudolf Bultmann. In the ensuing correspondence with his colleague<sup>21</sup>, Jonas depicts the adventure of God of getting involved in the world and its history by using a Christian notion, and in conversing with his Christian partner he does not shy away from speaking of a "total incarnation" or of the "full risk" or "sacrifice of the incarnation." He even tolerated his myth being labeled a "non-trinitarian myth of incarnation." Knowing of such characterizations, Jonas twenty years later warned his Tübingen audience against getting the terminology of his own myth mixed up with the Christian connotations implied in it: "It [his myth] does not, like the Christian expression 'the suffering God,' speak of a unique act in which the Deity, at a certain moment in time and for the express purpose of the redemption of humanity, send part of itself into a certain situation characterized by suffering. Rather, in his view the almost incarnate relationship of God to the world had been a relationship full of suffering on the part of God "from creation onwards." (25) Yet the fact that he had to warn of confusing them and had to make a clear distinction between them, points to the closeness of the two notions.

A further indication of the closeness of Jonas's thought to Christian theology in this point, a closeness that of course implies neither congruence nor agreement, is seen in the fact that also on the Christian side, the classical idea of God has entered a critical stage, and that this crisis of the Christian theistic understanding of God is, above all, a crisis of the idea of divine power.<sup>22</sup> Dogmatics, which had been shaped by Hellenistic philosophy, has rediscovered the "human" features in the biblical image of God, not least on the basis of contemporary experience, as with Hans Jonas (cf. 41f.). God's predicates of compassion and the ability to experience pain are again increasingly emphasized in Christian theology. Such developments, however, lead to new interpretations of God's omnipotence as the power of God's love. Even before Hans Jonas spoke up, Jürgen Moltmann, quite significantly, interpreted the role of God's power of creation in terms of the Jewish kabbalistic notion of *zimzum*, and postulated that a kind of self-limitation of the omnipotent and ubiquitous God had preceded the act of creation: "God creates ... by means of and through withdrawing from creation." The power of creation had to be considered "a self-humiliation of God towards his own impotence," "a work of divine humility and equally a divine form of self-communion. When God acts as Creator, he acts upon himself. His actions are founded in his passion."<sup>23</sup> In the context of the theology of Creation, Jonas's concept also forces Eberhard Jüngel to specify the notion of the original beginning "in terms of divine self-limitation."<sup>24</sup> Thus these Christian theologians and Hans Jonas are equally inspired by the kabbalistic idea of *zimzum* as a point of reference for interpreting the myth of creation.

Such closeness is not restricted to the idea of God's power of creation and God the Creator alone. It also arises from considering the Christian understanding of divine power in relation to history. According to the myth established by Jonas, God attends human activities "with baited breath, hoping and wooing" (23), and for "the period of the world proceeding on its way," i.e., as long as history lasts, he has "foregone all power of intervention in the physical course of mundane events." God responds "to the impact of such mundane events on his own being ... not by a show of 'mighty hand and outstretched arm,' ... but by the mutely penetrating wooing of his unachieved

aim" (42). There is a school of Christian theology that likewise interprets the attitude of the powerful God towards history and the actions of humans in terms analogous to this idea of God's "wooing." American process theology, which thinks of God, by virtue of his being a loving God, as sensitive, vulnerable, even dependent, aims to modify the idea of the omnipotence of God towards the notion that "God executes his power only in terms of his wooing humans and desiring to convince them, without being able to guarantee success. Thus God, in his love towards the world he created, runs a daring risk."<sup>25</sup>

One need not agree with the controversial theological assumptions and conclusions of process theology to be able to understand from a Christian viewpoint the intervention of God and his power in history under the image of divine wooing. Johannes B. Brantschen, for instance, finds it possible, in connection with the New Testament parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15), to speak of God's omnipotence as the coexistence of power and the powerlessness of love, and to interpret it in the following way: "This is the unprecedented event: God, the sovereign Lord of Heaven and Earth, begs for our love, but the almighty Father is powerless, as long as we humans do not answer the call of his obliging love from our very heart – for love without freedom is nothing but a piece of rigid iron. This powerlessness of love we experience today as the silence of God, or perhaps better, the discretion of God. God is discrete, at times even frighteningly discrete. ... However, God in his discrete love has put enough light into his signs to be discovered by those who search for him. God takes us seriously. He is discrete, because he loves us. That is the divine delicacy. ... God suffers as long as his love is not appreciated ... This waiting is God's way of experiencing pain."<sup>26</sup>

Brantschen formulates his thoughts with special reference to the individual's experience of illness and suffering, rather than vis-a-vis Auschwitz. That gives a somewhat parenetic and pastoral touch to his words and can lead to the aesthetic realm. Interestingly, Rudolf Bultmann asked Jonas the critical question of whether his myth might not remain "in the realm of aesthetics," and whether his idea of God in the last resort might not be "an aesthetic concept."<sup>27</sup> In his reply, Hans Jonas insists that God's committing his fate to human beings demands of the latter not an aesthetic, but an ethical response.<sup>28</sup> And yet one has to ask Jonas whether his depiction of God's response to what is happening in the world as an "intense but mute wooing" does not remain too firmly imbedded in the area of aesthetic judgement, which has the character not of a demand, but a request. "Time is the waiting of God, who begs for our love," Simone Weil once said. Emmanuel Levinas, when confronted with this statement, at once put in a correction, by adding: "[Time is the waiting of God] who *commands* our love."<sup>29</sup> Instead of God's wooing, his command; instead of an aesthetic "enticement," an ethical summons before the tribunal of never ending responsibility.

Another question arises from the coordination of immanence and transcendence of God in Hans Jonas's myth. If the divine basis of all existence retains no unaffected and immune "part" of itself, but entirely and unconditionally melts into immanence, then God's transcendence not only becomes unknowable epistemologically, but also dissolves ontologically. The total immanence of transcendence, when taken with radical seriousness, is in the last resort a lonely kind of immanence, in which an intense but mute wooing of transcendence cannot take place any longer, nor can an uprising, an epiphany of transcendence be expected. Christian theology responds to the intellectual difficulties of Jonas's myth with the Incarnation, understood on a Trinitarian basis: the Son enters history and the world, while the Father who sends out his Son in the Spirit continues to be God as a counterpart to the world.<sup>30</sup> A formal Christology lacking the figure of Christ along the lines of Hans Jonas's myth will hardly be able to solve the intellectual problem involved in the coordination of transcendence and immanence.<sup>31</sup> Not all Jewish descendance or *kenosis* theology, though, is affected by this objection. The classical Jewish teaching about God's bending down to humans refers to the God who is "seated on high" being enthroned in the heights" and "looks far down on the earth, and raises the poor from the dust" (cf. Psalm 113:6f.). Post-biblical tradition urges: "Wherever you find the greatness of the Holy One, praised be He, you will also find his humbleness. This is written in the Torah, is repeated in the words of the Prophets, and returns in the Writings for the third time" (bMeg 31a). The link between the descending God and

the God of the heights is inseparable, so that transcendence does not dissolve into immanence.

The theoretical/intellectual problem in the myth of Hans Jonas of not being able to find one's way out of the contradiction between total immanence and a nevertheless maintained transcendence, returns on the level of his more existentialist mode of expression. On the one hand, Jonas states regarding Auschwitz "no miraculous rescue happened; throughout the years of the fury at Auschwitz, God kept silent," while on the other hand, he continues, "the miracles that occurred were the work of human beings alone: [they were] the acts of those individual, often unknown 'righteous among the nations' who did not shun even the ultimate sacrifice." (41) Jonas now says of these righteous among the nations that "their hidden holiness is capable of making up for immeasurable guilt." (48) Yet must not the holiness of the righteous in the context of Jonas's mythological manner of speaking be understood as the salvation of God's own cause, arising from the innermost essence of divine existence (cf. 23f.), as an echo of his intense but mute wooing, indeed, as the very manner of his being present, of his speaking? Looked at from the vantage point of Jonas's own assumptions, would it not then be God himself speaking in the holiness of the righteous? And would we not then confront the tension between the absence of miracles and the simultaneous occurring of miracles, the tension between God being silent and yet speaking through the holiness of the righteous?

Finally, we will consider the contribution of Hans Jonas's proposal to theodicy. His concept of God presents a powerless God, a defenseless God – a figure whom Christian theology has every reason to think about. In an exchange with E. Levinas about this question, Bishop Klaus Hemmerle spoke most impressively about God's defenselessness, which in a process of self-denial reaches the point where he can do nothing but ask humans for their love. To this Levinas replied: "Such defenselessness in this situation, however, costs many suffering human lives. Can we speak in such a manner? We are not involved in a disputation on God's capacity to sympathize with those who suffer. I don't understand this notion of 'defenselessness' today, after Auschwitz. After what happened at Auschwitz, it sometimes seems to me to mean that the good Lord is asking for a kind of love that holds no element of promise. That is how I think of it: the meaning of Auschwitz is a form of suffering and of believing quite without any promise in return. That is to say: tout-à-fait gratuit. But then I say to myself: it costs too much – not to the good Lord, but to humankind. That is my critique, my lack of understanding with regard to the idea of defenselessness. This powerless *kenosis* has cost humanity all too dearly."<sup>32</sup>

If Levinas's objection is a Jewish critique of the Christian understanding of divine self-renunciation in Jesus Christ, it also touches Jonas's own myth of God relinquishing himself towards immanence. Here as well, God has undergone a powerless *kenosis* which "costs humanity all too dearly." The price of the truth of Jonas's myth appears to be too high. The objection that God's powerless *kenosis* costs human beings too much moves toward an understanding which – here going beyond Levinas – contains the promise of justice even to those who perished at Auschwitz. Suing for such justice means to make room for the "lamenting human complaint to God about the horrors occurring in his creation." This is the whole point of the question of theodicy, as Johann Baptist Metz so insistently keeps asking it.<sup>33</sup> And in this respect, Jonas's scheme seems oppressive, and lacking in any form of promise. His call for God-talk to appear before the bar of understandability and be challenged by this-worldly history leads to forsaking the idea of God's omnipotence and leaves a total absence of promise to those who have suffered in the past and to the dead of the Shoah.<sup>34</sup>

Do we really have to forsake talking about the omnipotence of God? Must we indeed renounce the yearning for a powerful God? Do those who at Auschwitz proved to be the righteous ones, the saints of the Shoah, tell us that what they longed for, namely, the omnipotence of God, must – according to another statement of Emmanuel Levinas – in the very yearning for it "remain apart, must appear holy as something worthy of desire – close, yet separate"? God's omnipotence awakens our yearning for it, calls into being a move towards it, and yet at the very moment when

that divine omnipotence is most urgently needed, it seems to yield place to the other person, to the neighbor, in a kind of responsibility that can go as far – and with the saints of the Shoah has indeed done so – as substituting oneself for the other person. This would seem to be the omnipotence of God remaining apart to the point of its very absence. It would seem to be an "intrigue" of the omnipotent God, entrusting my fellow human to me. This "intrigue" of God would be a kind of self-limitation that calls us into unlimited responsibility for our fellow human beings.<sup>35</sup>

The notion of God's omnipotence and the yearning contained in it<sup>36</sup> must pass the acid test of the ethical demand. This is where it finds its real meaning for each respective present; it will not let us avoid this test. Therein one could see the prospective meaning of any talk of God's omnipotence; this could be its ethical content. At the same time, such talk contains a dimension of "going beyond" that is of particular relevance to those who cannot be reached by my responsible action in each present moment: to the suffering and the dead of history. Beyond its, so to speak, prospective meaning, the word of God's omnipotence is a cry for God's saving power, appealing to him to be effective and powerful for those who suffered and died. One could speak of a commemorating and an appealing meaning of talk of God's omnipotence. Talking about God without appealing to him, and without any promise for the dead of history and the Shoah, is challenged by the question of theodicy, as it is pointedly formulated by Johann Baptist Metz. Such a challenge is also pertinent to Hans Jonas's concept.

## Conclusion

As insistently as we have sought a note of hope for the dead of Auschwitz in Hans Jonas's concept of God, and as seriously as the question of the dissolution of God as the counterpart to humans (and thus the continuing possibility of prayer) must be directed to Jonas's myth and its theological explication, it is equally appropriate to mention that Jonas accompanies his theoretical exposition with a very personal confession. This confession is clearly a move onto a different level of human expression, while still representing Hans Jonas the person. His concept breathes the pathos of candidness; he seeks understandability to be able to go on living. This seeking reflects the integrity and autonomy of Hans Jonas as a human being, one who at the same time can be quite humble. The answer he gives in his myth to the question of Job "is opposed to that put in the Book of Job, which looks to the omnipotence of the Creator God, while mine posits his renunciation of power." To Jonas, both answers constitute "praise," their countermovement being held together by what they have in common. Of his "poor word" of praise he would like to hope "that it would not be excluded from what Goethe in his 'Vermächtnis altpersischen Glaubens' (Legacy of Ancient Persian Belief) expresses as follows: 'And all that stammers praise to the Supreme / in circle by circle there gathered does seem'" (48f.). This is a personal avowal of faith in a God who is on high, who is a counterpart, and thus is praiseworthy. This must be pointed out so that the critique directed at Jonas's intellectual scheme not be extended to a critique of Jonas as a person.

By creating his myth, Hans Jonas has echoed the faded screams of his mother, who was murdered at Auschwitz. From the standpoint of Auschwitz, he has directed his question to God, in a speculative gesture as it were. The appraisal of his urgent proposal attempted here follows him in this speculative gesture, on the level of thought and argumentation. What Jonas says about his own scheme is even more true of this appraisal: "All this is mere stammering" (48). Stammering it has been in its agreement with Jonas and in its questioning of him. The agreement revealed characteristics that Jonas's scheme has in common with contemporary Christian theology. The questioning presented possible objections from outside as well as examining the inner coherence of Jonas's understanding of God. Our appraisal did not see its task as that of submitting a definitive alternative scheme. Nor was it bent on attempting to make sense of the events of Auschwitz. Like Hans Jonas himself, our appraisal also does not wish to forsake the idea of God. Indeed, it does not wish to forsake the idea of a powerful God; it wants to acknowledge the yearning for an omnipotent God. This is a yearning that cannot avoid the acid test of ethical

demands, and is challenged not to seek solace for oneself, but to live in hope for others.

#### Notes

1. E. Wiesel, *Die Nacht zu begraben*, Elischa, Eßlingen o. J., 93f.
2. So E. Levinas, *Die Tora mehr zu lieben als Gott* (1955), in: E. Levinas, *Schwierige Freiheit. Versuch über das Judentum*, Frankfurt a.M. 1992, 109-113, who presents the most impressive interpretation of this text. Other interpretations: U. Bohn, *Thora in der Grenzsituation*, in: P. von der Osten-Sacken (ed.), *Treue zur Thora. FS Günther Harder*, Berlin 1977, 124-134; P. Lenhardt/P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Rabbi Akiva*, Berlin 1987, 332ff; H. Luibl, *Wenn der Herr sein Gesicht von den Betenden abwendet. Zu Zwi Kolitz: „Jossel Rackower spricht zu Gott“*, in: *Orientierung* 52 (1988) 5-8. The German translation of this text itself was published in: *Almanach für Literatur und Theologie* 2, Wuppertal 1986, 19-28; M. Stöhr (ed.), *Erinnern - nicht vergessen*, München 1979, 107-118; P. von der Osten-Sacken (ed.), *Das Ostjudentum*, Berlin 1981, 161-168; *Judaica* 39 (1983) 211-220. Compare the attempt of a strophic transliteration of R. Brandstaetter, in: K. Wolff (ed.), *Hiob* 1943. *Ein Requiem für das Warschauer Getto*, Berlin 1983, 274-276.
3. *The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz* (1970), in: E. L. Fackenheim, *God's Presence in History. Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*, New York 1970, 67-98. Fackenheim has repeated his position in further publications: *Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, New York 1973; *The Jewish Return to History*, New York 1978; *To Mend the World*, New York 1982; *The Jewish Bible after Auschwitz. A Re-reading*, New York 1990; *Jewish-Christian Relations after the Holocaust. Toward Post-Holocaust Theological Thought*, Chicago 1996; *Was ist Judentum? Eine Deutung für die Gegenwart*, Berlin 1999. Literature on Fackenheim: B. Dupuy, *Un theologies juif de l'Holocauste*, Emil Fackenheim, in: *Foi et Vie* 73. No. 4 (1974) 11-21; E.Z. Charry, *Jewish Holocaust Theology. An Assessment*, in: *JES* 18 (1981) 128-139; S. Lubarsky, *Ethics and Theodicy. Tensions in Emil Fackenheim's Thought*, in: *Encounter* 44 (1983) 59-72; M.J. Morgan, *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim. A Reader*, Detroit 1987; G. Niekamp, *Christologie nach Auschwitz*, Freiburg 1994, 131-135.
4. The text of H. Jonas was published: H. Jonas, *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme* (suhrkamp taschenbuch 1516), Frankfurt 1987 (the pages in the ongoing text of this manuscript are of this edition); other publications of the text in: O. Hofius (ed.), *Reflexionen finsterner Zeit. Zwei Vorträge von Fritz Stern und Hans Jonas*, Tübingen 1984, 61-86; *Von Gott reden in Auschwitz?*, in: *Zentralkomitee der deutschen Katholiken* (ed.), *Dem Leben trauen, weil Gott es mit uns lebt*. 88. Deutscher Katholikentag vom 4. bis 8. Juli 1984 in München. Dokumentation, Paderborn 1984, 235-246 and: Hans Jonas, *Philosophische Untersuchungen und metaphysische Vermutungen*, Frankfurt 1992, 190-208. A french translation: *Le Concept de Dieu après Auschwitz. Une voix juive. Suivi d'un essai de Catherine Chalié*, Paris 1994.
5. E. Jüngel, *Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung. Ein Beitrag zum Gespräch mit Hans Jonas über den »Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz«*, in: H. Deuser u.a. (eds.), *Gottes Zukunft -Zukunft der Welt* (FS Jürgen Moltmann), München 1986, 265-275; W. Oelmüller, *Hans Jonas. Mythos - Gnosis - Prinzip Verantwortung*, in: *StZ* 113 (1988) 343-351; Marcus Braybrooke, *Time to meet. Towards a deeper relationship between Jews and Christians*, London/Philadelphia 1990, 123ff.; H. Kreß, *Philosophische Theologie im Horizont des neuzeitlichen Nihilismus. Philosophie und Gottesgedanke bei Wilhelm Weischedel und Hans Jonas*, in: *ZThK* 88 (1991), 101-120; H. Küng, *Das Judentum*, München/Zürich 1991 714ff; W. Oelmüller (ed.), *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann. Neue Diskussionen zur Theodizeefrage*, München 1992, passim; W. Groß/H.J. Kuschel, *»Ich schaffe Finsternis und Unheil!« Ist Gott verantwortlich für das Übel?*, Mainz 1992, 170-175; C. Thoma, *Das Messiasprojekt. Theologie jüdisch-christlicher Begegnung*, Augsburg 1994, 394ff; G. Schiwy, *Abschied vom allmächtigen Gott*, München 1995, 10ff, 36f., 76-85, 92-98, u.ö.; G. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie*,

- Freiburg 1997, 279ff.; K.-H. Menke, in: H. Wagner (ed.), *Mit Gott streiten. Neue Zugänge zum Theodizee-Problem*, Freiburg 1998, 125ff.; V. Lenzen, *Jüdisches Leben und Sterben im Namen Gottes. Studien über die Heiligung des göttlichen Namens (Kiddusch-HaSchem)*, München/Zürich 2000 (2. Auflage), 140ff. u.a.
6. Cf. R. McAfee Brown, *Elie Wiesel. Zeuge für die Menschheit*, Freiburg 1990; W. Groß/ K.-J. Kuschel, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 135-153; E. Schuster/R. Boschert-Kimmig (eds.), *Trotzdem hoffen. Mit Johann Baptist Metz und Elie Wiesel im Gespräch*, Mainz 1993; R. Boschki, *Der Schrei. Gott und Mensch im Werk von Elie Wiesel*, Mainz 1994; G. Langenhorst, *Hiob unser Zeitgenosse. Die literarische Hiob-Rezeption im 20. Jahrhundert als theologische Herausforderung*, Mainz 1994, *passim*.
  7. H. Jonas, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*, Frankfurt 1979, <sup>2</sup>1984. The main stations of his work are indicated by: *Der Begriff der Gnosis*, Göttingen 1930; *Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsproblem*, Göttingen 1930, <sup>2</sup>1965; *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist. Zwei Teile*, Göttingen 1934, <sup>2</sup>1954 und 1954, <sup>2</sup>1993; *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology*, New York 1963; *Organismus und Freiheit. Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie*, Göttingen 1973; *Technik, Medizin und Ethik. Zur Praxis des Prinzips Verantwortung*, Frankfurt 1985. Compare the ongoing reception of Jonas's work: W. Fasching, article „Jonas, Hans“, in: *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, Band XV (1998), 723-733; C. Albert, article „Jonas, Hans“, in: B. Lutz (ed.), *Die großen Philosophen des 20. Jahrhunderts. Biographisches Lexikon*, München 1999 and the informations of the Hans Jonas-Centre Berlin in: [www.fu-berlin.de/~boehler/Jonas-Zentrum](http://www.fu-berlin.de/~boehler/Jonas-Zentrum).
  8. So H. Kreß, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 109ff and similarly W. Lesch, *Ethische Argumentation im jüdischen Kontext. Zum Verständnis von Ethik bei Emmanuel Levinas und Hans Jonas*, in: *FZPhTh* 38 (1991) 443-69, 464. Compare the own statement of Jonas in: H. Koelbl, *Jüdische Portraits. Photographien und Interviews*, Frankfurt 1989, 120-123, 123.
  9. Cf. the articles in: »Philosophische Untersuchungen« (footnote 4).
  10. E. Jüngel, *ibidem* (footnote 5), 269.
  11. Compare the statements of the Jewish traditional literature only in: P. Kuhn, *Gottes Selbsterniedrigung in der Theologie der Rabbinen*, München 1968; A.M. Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung der Schekhinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur*, München 1972; P. Kuhn, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der rabbinischen Überlieferung*, Leiden 1978; H. Ernst, *Rabbinische Traditionen über Gottes Nähe und Gottes Leid*, in: C. Thoma/M. Wyschogrod (eds.), *Das Reden vom einen Gott bei Juden und Christen*, Berlin 1984, 157-177, C. Thoma/ S. Lauer, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen. Erster und zweiter Teil*, Bern 1986 and 1992; E.E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Cambridge, Mass. 1987, 37-79; M.E. Lodahl, *Shekhinah/Spirit. Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion*, New York/ Mahwah 1992; C. Thoma, *Messiasprojekt* (footnote 5), 78ff, 409ff u.ö.
  12. In the Middle Ages the Jewish discussion of the possibility to mediate the three attributes of God reflected the mediation of the omnipotence, goodness and providence; compare the study of B.S. Kogan, »Sorgt Gott sich wirklich?« - Saadja Gaon, Juda Halevi und Maimonides über das Problem des Bösen, in: H.H. Henrix (ed.), *Unter dem Bogen des Bundes*, Aachen 1981, 47-73. See as an example of the early Christian discussion of the issue only: Laktanz, *Vom Zorne Gottes (Texte zur Forschung 4)*, Darmstadt <sup>2</sup>1971, 45ff.
  13. Jonas follows to: G. Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen*, Frankfurt/M. 1967, 285ff; *idem*, *Über einige Begriffe des Judentums*, Frankfurt 1970, 53-89 (= *Schöpfung aus Nichts und Selbstbeschränkung Gottes*). Cf. *idem*, Art. »Kabbalah«, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica XI* (Jerusalem <sup>4</sup>1978), 489-653, 588-597 and M. Fritz, *A Midrash: The Self-Limitation of God*, in: *JES* 22 (1985) 703-714.
  14. Cf. to this motif: G. Scholem, *Die 36 verborgenen Gerechten in der jüdischen Tradition*, in: *idem*., *Judaica*, Frankfurt 1968, 216-225; article »Lamed Vav Zaddikim«, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica X* (Jerusalem <sup>4</sup>1978), 1367f.
  15. C.-F. Geyer requires the „tribunal of reason“ in his studies on the history of the discernable concept of theodicy, in: W. Oelmüller (ed.), *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann* (Footnote

- 5), 209-242. His position is criticized by G. Neuhaus, *Theodizee - Abbruch oder Anstoß des Glaubens?*, Freiburg 1993, 144ff; cf. also the discussion in: H. Wagner (ed.), *Mit Gott streiten. Neue Zugänge zum Theodizee-Problem* (QD 169), Freiburg 1998.
16. M. Wyschogrod, *Gott - ein Gott der Erlösung*, in: M. Brocke/H. Jochum, *ibidem* (Footnote 2), 178-194, 185. See also V. Lenzen, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 141.
  17. So in reception of F. Rosenzweig and his reflection of the question in what sense his »Star of Redemption« is a Jewish book: *Das neue Denken* (1925), in: *idem*, *Zweistromland* (= Franz Rosenzweig, *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften III*), Dordrecht 1984, 139-161, 155.
  18. A. Goldberg, *Ist Gott allmächtig? Was die Rabbinen Hans Jonas antworten könnten*, in: *Judaica* 47 (1991) 51-58 criticized the absolute renunciation of the divine power; the rabbinical understanding of the concept of God's power could accept a partial renunciation and preserved the possibility of the divine judgement. Interpretating Is. 45,7 and its daily recitation in the morning prayer Goldberg argued: »He, who claims that only the good can come from God, denies one of the few dogmas of Judaism« (56). The provocation of the biblical speech of God as the creator of the light and darkness is reflected by: W. Groß/ K.J. Kuschel, *ibidem* (Footnote 5) and M. Görg, *Der un-heile Gott. Die Bibel im Bann der Gewalt*, Düsseldorf 1995.
  19. H.U. von Balthasar spoke on Israel as »a formal Christology« in his booklet on Buber: *Einsame Zwiesprache. Martin Buber und das Christentum*, Köln/ Olten 1958, 83. But he develops insufficiently the affirmative dimension of such a characterization; this is criticized by: H.H. Henrix, »Israel ist seinem Wesen nach formale Christologie«. *Die Bedeutung H.U. von Balthasars für F.-W. Marquardts Christologie*, in: *BThZ* 9 (1993) 135-153.
  20. H. Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit. Drei Aufsätze zur Lehre vom Menschen*. Göttingen 1963, 44-62, 55ff.
  21. *Ibidem*, 63-72; Jonas's using of the term of incarnation: 68.69.70.71.
  22. The concept of omnipotence – long generations a firm component of the Christian teaching of the divine attributes – is marginalized in contemporary dogmatics; compare only: *Mysterium Salutis. Volumes 1 to 5 and the supplement*, Einsiedeln/ Zürich/ Köln 1965-1981; *Lexikon der katholischen Dogmatik*, Freiburg 1987; P. Eicher (ed.), *Neue Summe Theologie. Bände 1 und 2*, Düsseldorf 1992. But see also J. Auer, *Gott - der Eine und Dreieine* (*Kleine Katholische Dogmatik II*), Regensburg 1978, 422-431 and the discussion of O. John, *Die Allmächtsprädikation in einer christlichen Gottesrede nach Auschwitz*, in: E. Schillebeeckx (ed.), *Mystik und Politik. Theologie im Ringen um Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (FS Johann Baptist Metz), Mainz 1988, 202-218 and Th. Pröpfer, article »Allmacht Gottes«, in: *LThK Bd. 1* (1993), 412-417.
  23. J. Moltmann, *Trinität und Reich Gottes. Zur Gotteslehre*, München 1980, 124f.
  24. E. Jüngel, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 271. But compare the striking criticism of this reflection by H. Küng, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 717ff.
  25. So after H. Vorgrimler, *Theologische Gotteslehre*, Düsseldorf 1985, 150ff.
  26. J.B. Brantschen, *Die Macht und Ohnmacht der Liebe. Randglossen zum dogmatischen Satz: Gott ist veränderlich*, in: *FZPhTh* 27 (1980) 224-246, 238f. Cf. also G. Neuhaus, *ibidem* (footnote 15), 264ff and H. Fronhofen, *Ist der christliche Gott allmächtig?*, in: *StZ* 117 (1992) 519-528, 523.
  27. R. Bultmann, in: H. Jonas, *Zwischen Nichts und Ewigkeit*, *ibidem* (footnote 20), 66f
  28. H. Jonas, *ibidem*, 70f.
  29. So the manuscript of the dialogue on the Judaism and Christianity in the thinking of Franz Rosenzweig which was published in a shortened version: *Judentum und Christentum nach Franz Rodsenzweig. Ein Gespräch*, in: G. Fuchs/H.H. Henrix (eds.), *Zeitgewinn. Messianisches Denken nach Franz Rosenzweig*, Frankfurt 1987, 163-183.
  30. Similarly the criticism of E. Jüngel, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 272f and W. Oelmüller, *Hans Jonas*, *ibidem* (Footnote 5), 346.
  31. Compare the literature according to the footnote 11 and: W. Orbach, *The four Faces of God: Toward a Theology of Powerlessness*, in: *Judaism* 32 (1983) 236-247; E. Levinas,

Judaïsme et Kénose, in: Archivi di Filosofia LIII (1985) Nr.2-3 (Ebraismo. Ellenismo. Cristianesimo), 13-28 and R. Neudecker, Die vielen Gesichter des einen Gottes, München 1989, 69-105.

32. In: G. Fuchs/H.H. Henrix, *ibidem*, (footnote 29), 170.
33. J.B. Metz, Theologie als Theodizee?, in: W. Oelmüller (ed.), *Theodizee - Gott vor Gericht?*, München 1990, 103-118; Plädoyer für mehr Theodizee-Empfindlichkeit in der Theologie, in: W. Oelmüller (ed.), *Worüber man nicht schweigen kann* (footnote 5), 125-137; Die Rede von Gott angesichts der Leidensgeschichte der Welt, in: *StZ* 117 (1992) 311-320; Karl Rahners Ringen um die theologische Ehre des Menschen, in: *StZ* (1994) 383-393 (quotation there: 391); *Religion und Politik auf dem Boden der Moderne*, Frankfurt 1996; *Gottesgedächtnis im Zeitalter kultureller Amnesie*, in: Th. Faulhaber/B. Stubenrauch (eds.), *Wenn Gott verloren geht. Die Zukunft des Glaubens in der säkularisierten Gesellschaft* (QD 174), Freiburg 1998, 108-115.
34. Strangely enough the momentum of the lack of any form of promise to the victims of the history is faded out by G. Schiwy's plea for the »discharge of the almighty« (Footnote 5).
35. See the idea of an »intrigue« of God – here in our context applied on the idea of the divine omnipotence - by E. Levinas: *Gott und die Philosophie*, in: B. Casper (ed.), *Gott nennen. Phänomenologische Zugänge*, Freiburg/München 1981, 81-123, 104ff.
36. This in nearness to thoughts of H. Küng, *ibidem* (footnote 5), 731ff and O. John, *ibidem* (footnote 22).

Dr. Hans Hermann Henrix is Director of the Catholic Academy of the Diocese of Aachen, Germany. With kind permission of the author.

*(Translation from the German revised by F. Sherman)*