

CHRISTOLOGY IN LIGHT OF THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

THE REVOLUTION IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH UNDERSTANDING

Jesus of Nazareth lived and died as a believing Jew. Moreover, as Church historian Franklin Littell has compellingly reminded us, if Jesus had been alive during the time when the Nazis were exterminating Jews in Europe he would have gone to the crematoria with his people. Yet many Christians (and Jews as well) have been conditioned to regard Jesus as essentially anti-Jewish in the fundamentals of his teaching and preaching. As the 1985 Vatican *Notes* on the proper way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis tell us, "Jesus was and always remained a Jew. . . . Jesus is fully a man of his time, and his environment—the Jewish Palestinian one of the first century, the anxieties and hope of which he shared."¹ Cardinal Carlo Martini of Milan, formerly rector of the Biblicum in Rome, makes much the same point: "In its origins Christianity is deeply rooted in Judaism. Without a sincere feeling for the Jewish world, therefore, and a direct experience of it, one cannot understand Christianity. Jesus is fully Jewish, the apostles are Jewish, and one cannot doubt their attachment to the traditions of their forefathers."²

This new attitude towards Judaism and the Jewish people within Catholicism has its roots in Vatican II's "Declaration on Non-Christian Religions" (*Nostra Aetate*) whose fourth chapter set the Jewish-Christian theological relationship on a fundamentally new course. It also has resulted from significant new scholarship on the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament as well as the reflections of individual Christian scholars such as Karl Barth and Johannes Metz who, in the light of the Holocaust, have recognized not only the need for a totally new approach to the Church's theology of Judaism but have understood that such a change will impact all theological statements within Christianity, not merely the Church's theology of Judaism and the Jewish people. Also contributing to this fundamental rethinking of Catholic thinking about Jews and Judaism have been many ecclesial documents, including official Vatican declarations in 1974 and 1985, as well as a series of important statements by Pope John Paul II who has

¹See Helga Croner, ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents 1975-1983* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 1985) 226.

²Carlo Maria Martini, "Christianity and Judaism: A Historical and Theological Overview," in *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1990) 19.

strongly emphasized the deep, continuing bonding between Jews and Christians at the very basic level of their identity.³

Research growing out of the contemporary Christian-Jewish encounter has begun to impact significantly on New Testament interpretation. It is no exaggeration to say that, however quietly, a genuine revolution is well under way in New Testament scholarship. Stimulating this revolution is an enhanced understanding of Hebrew and Aramaic in Christian circles and a greater exposure to materials from Judaism's Second Temple period, what Christians frequently term the "intertestamental period." We are currently experiencing the rapid dissolution of the dominance over New Testament interpretation held by Rudolf Bultmann and his disciples who highlighted the Hellenistic setting of Pauline Christianity. This exegetical approach to the New Testament resulted in a distancing of Jesus from his actual ties to biblical and Second Temple Judaism. Scholars working within the Bultmannian framework tended overwhelmingly to depict Jesus in heavily "universalist" tones. Intended or not, such portrayals opened the door for the development of theological anti-Judaism which exercised considerable influence over the centuries in shaping Christian moral and theological thinking.

The last decade or so has witnessed a profound shift of gravity in New Testament exegesis. Leading the directional shift have been scholars such as W. D. Davies, E. P. Sanders, Clemens Thoma, Anthony J. Saldarini, Cardinal Carlo Martini of Milan, James Charlesworth, Daniel Harrington, Robin Scroggs, James D. G. Dunn and others. The list continues to grow. Although their views do not coalesce at every turn, these exegetes nonetheless share the conviction that Jesus must be restored to his fundamentally Jewish milieu if the Church is to interpret his message properly. The title of one of James Charlesworth's books captures well the central thrust of this new movement, *Jesus within Judaism*.⁴ Arthur J. Droge, in a review of E. P. Sanders's volume *Jesus and Judaism*, speaks of the impact of this movement in rather blunt terms: "Like Professor Sanders, I take this to be a positive development—a sign that New Testament studies is finally emerging from its 'Bultmannian captivity'."⁵

³Helga Croner, ed., *Stepping Stones to Further Jewish-Christian Relations: An Unabridged Collection of Christian Documents* (London/New York: Stimulus Books, 1977); Helga Croner, ed., *More Stepping Stones to Jewish-Christian Relations* (New York, 1985); Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki, eds., *John Paul II On Jews and Judaism 1979-1986* (Washington DC: NCCB Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs and Anti-Defamation League (USCC Publications, 1987). For a Collection of World Council of Churches and Protestant regional and denominational documents, see Allan Brockway, Paul van Buren, Rolf Rendtorff, and Simon Schoon, eds., *The Theology of the Churches and the Jewish Peoples: Statements by the World Council and its Member Churches* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988).

⁴James Charlesworth, *Jesus within Judaism*, Anchor Bible Reference Library 1 (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1988).

⁵Arthur J. Droge, "The Facts About Jesus: Some thoughts on E. P. Sanders's *Jesus*

Significant refinements in the positions of these scholars undoubtedly will emerge as time goes on, particularly regarding specific points such as Jesus' relationship to Pharisaic Judaism and the meaning of his parables. But there is little doubt that the increasing consensus among New Testament exegetes about Jesus' basic Jewish roots is rapidly transforming the Church's overall perspective on his ministry and person.

Considerable new thinking has begun to emerge within Pauline studies as well. An increasing number of scholars are now more willing to entertain the idea that Paul never intended to separate his newly formed Christian communities from the Jewish people. He may even have been far more positive towards the continued practice of Torah among Christians than Christians have traditionally been led to believe. Surely the sharp contrasts between grace and law, between Jewish law and Christian love, are increasingly coming into question in the light of new research. Pioneering scholars in this field such as Bishop Krister Stendahl have now been joined by the likes of E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, Peter Tomson, Daniel Harrington, Jewish scholar Alan Segal, John White, and the scholars associated with the "Paul and Jewish Response Literature" project coordinated by Hayim G. Perelmuter and Wilhelm Wuellner. While this reevaluation of Paul is not as far along as the reevaluation of Jesus' basic relationship to Judaism, it is becoming clear that any systematic or moral perspectives within Christianity rooted in the classical contrasts between "law and love" or "law and grace" supposedly based on Pauline teaching stand on a crumbling foundation.

Several years ago Robin Scroggs attempted to summarize the major themes in this "re-Judaization" of Christian biblical scholarship. While this outline would not characterize all scholars associated with the movement, and some might quarrel with one or more of the particular points, it is a useful summary of the general conclusions being reached.

Scroggs says that more and more scholars identified with this new perspective are depicting the movement launched by Jesus and continued after his death as fundamentally a reform effort within Judaism with little or no consciousness of any basic rupture with its Jewish matrix. Paul's efforts in this line of thought are regarded as primarily a Jewish mission to the Gentiles, to include them in the ongoing covenant. It was not until sometime after the Jewish war with Rome that Christians began to develop a distinctive self-identity. But even then, as the later writings of the New Testament show us, there remained some sense of a continued link to the Jewish people.⁶ And, as Anthony Saldarini has shown, this situation continued for quite sometime in many parts of the Church, but especially in the East. For Saldarini the early Jesus movement and rabbinic Judaism started as two efforts to reform existing Judaism. The rabbis succeeded

and Judaism," *Criterion* 26 (1987) 15.

⁶Robin Scroggs, "The Judaizing of the New Testament," *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 76 (1986) 42-43.

eventually in transforming Jewish life and practice in Mesopotamia and the Roman Empire. The movement based on Jesus' teachings impacted primarily the Gentile world and eventually became an independent, but closely related religion. "Yet," says Saldarini, "in the East, many believers-in-Jesus retained a close association with Jewish communities and shared with them many cultural characteristics. . . . Despite Christian anti-Semitism, positive relationships continued between Jews and Christians." For Saldarini, then, this new scholarship regarding the first two centuries of the common era demonstrates the invalidity of any paradigm of two orthodox traditions dominating two independent religions from the second century onwards. The relationship between Jews and Christians in many parts of the world continued to remain fluid and complex in many regions for several more centuries.⁷

The developments in the area of Scripture studies have begun to make some impact on the various theological disciplines. But their influence has been limited at best and confined to a select group of Church leaders and scholars. Vatican II made new thinking on the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship possible when its document on non-Christian religions *Nostra Aetate* (chapter four) undercut the basis for the classical Christian theology of covenantal displacement by arguing that Jews could not be blamed collectively for murdering Jesus and insisting that, however one interprets the new revelation in Christ, it must include the notion that the original covenant with the Jewish people remains intact. Pope John Paul II has led the way of proposing a reconstituted theology of the Church's relationship with the Jewish people in light of *Nostra Aetate*. In numerous addresses he has stressed the inherent bonding that remains between Christians and Jews who are linked at the most basic level of their self-identity.⁸

As for individual theologians, we see several trends emerging. One prominent direction is the strong emphasis on a single covenant in which both Jews and Christians share. Paul van Buren, Bernard Dupuy, and Marcel Dubois have tended to emphasize this approach. It has also been the prevailing perspective in the writings of John Paul II. Cardinal Carlo Martini has spoken in a somewhat similar vein, though he has chosen to return to the "schism" model first proposed in 1948 by the Belgian Benedictine Dom Oehmen and recently endorsed by James D. G. Dunn as well in his *The Partings of the Ways*.⁹ In reinterpreting this model, Martini underscores the fact that, theologically speaking, Christians need to recognize that they are not merely in a relationship of dialogue with Jews, but one of inherent bonding which carries implications for every aspect of Christian

⁷Anthony J. Saldarini, "Jews and Christians in the First Two Centuries: The Changing Paradigm," *Shofar* 10 (1992) 34.

⁸See Fisher and Klenicki, eds., *John Paul II on Jews and Judaism*.

⁹James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1991) 269.

faith-expression.¹⁰ Martini thus joins a growing list of Christian thinkers who are insisting that the theological restatement of the Christian-Jewish relationship launched by *Nostra Aetate* and similar Protestant documents¹¹ has profound significance for all of Christian theology (including ethical thought), not merely for Jewish-Christian relations. It touches upon basic ecclesial identity.

A second group of contemporary Christian thinkers involved in the dialogue with Jews continues to speak of two distinctive covenantal traditions in terms of Judaism and Christianity even though most would also stress strong, ongoing ties between them. Franz Mussner seems to move in this direction, and it is my basic framework as well. For both Mussner and myself Christology as developed in the latter strata of New Testament materials, especially in Pauline literature and in the Gospel of John, constitutes in the end the fundamental uniqueness of the revelation through Jesus. This revelation does not invalidate the earlier revelation given to the people Israel at Sinai; nor does it in any way signify a displacement of Jews by Christians in the covenantal relationship. Rather, it involves the creation of a second, parallel covenant which retains deep roots in the past. So most theologians leaning in the direction of a double covenant model do not necessarily reject all aspects of the single covenantal approach. On the contrary, they would join the single covenant proponents in stressing a high degree of continued bonding. But they feel that Christian theological particularity, especially as it emerges from incarnational Christology, as well as Jewish distinctiveness resulting from two thousand years of separate existence, are better safeguarded in the double covenantal model.

A handful of contemporary Christian theologians, most prominently Rosemary Ruether and Paul Knitter,¹² tend toward what might be termed a multicovenantal orientation. Ruether is definitely more emphatic than Knitter on this point, viewing the Christ event as one of many possible messianic experiences. Both agree, however, that Christians and Jews need to go beyond the parameters of their special bonding in exploring covenantal relationships with other faith traditions.

The process of rethinking theologically the Christian-Jewish relationship cannot be pursued successfully in isolation from parallel developments among Jewish and Christian scholars who are reexamining traditional assumptions about the growth and reconfiguration of Judaism in the period of Jesus' ministry and the emergence of the Christian churches. The works of Jacob Neusner, Efraim Schmuely, Gabriele Boccacini, and Hayim Perlemuter, to name only four, make it increasingly difficult to posit any simplistic vertical development from Judaism

¹⁰See Carlo Maria Martini, "The Relation of the Church to the Jewish People," *From the Martin Buber House* 6 (1984) 9.

¹¹See n. 3, above.

¹²See Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Seabury, 1974) and Paul Knitter, *No Other Name?* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1985).

to Christianity.¹³ Yet so much of Christian theological argumentation (including that found in *Veritatis Splendor*) assumes such a vertical development. When Jacob Neusner, for example, posits the existence of a multiplicity of Judaisme throughout history, including during the first century of the common era, Christian scholars will have to take notice. For if Neusner is correct, it will prove much more difficult to speak about the theology of the Jewish-Christian relationship in a way that presumes a certain basic homogeneity in Judaism at the time. If this basic homogeneity is in fact missing, then we may be compelled to accept an understanding of the relationship far more modest and nuanced in its claims. And when Irving Greenberg describes rabbinic Judaism as a more advanced stage of religious consciousness than Christianity (which remains tied far more to biblical forms of Judaism)¹⁴ or when Hayim Perelmuter speaks of Jews and Christians as two new, distinctive "sibling" groups, both parented by biblical Judaism, the nature of the conversation about Jewish-Christian bondedness is significantly affected. Their conclusions also seriously challenge traditional models of Christianity's fulfillment of Judaism.

CHRISTOLOGY AFTER THE SHOAH

In the last decade or so a number of Christian theologians have addressed the issue of Christology and the Shoah, though some in rather sketchy fashion. Important names who have contributed to this discussion include Johannes Metz, Franklin Sherman, Rebecca Chopp, James Moore, Douglas Hall, Marcel Dubois and, of course, Jurgen Moltmann. My own writings have also taken up the topic, but, as I now have come to see, rather incompletely. On the whole, however, even Christian theologians who have contributed substantially to the reconstruction of the theology of the Christian-Jewish relationship have failed to relate this effort to the Shoah experience in any explicit way. Paul van Buren is a case in point, as the criticism by Rubenstein and Roth of his writings on this point ably shows.¹⁵

Johannes Metz has emphasized the need after the Shoah for the churches to adjust their basic Christological formulations insofar as they impinge on the fate

¹³See Jacob Neusner, *Death and Birth of Judaism: The Impact of Christianity, Secularism, and the Holocaust on Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); Efraim Shmueli, *Seven Jewish Cultures: A Reinterpretation of Jewish History and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991); and Hayim G. Perelmuter.

¹⁴See Irving Greenberg, "The Third Great Cycle of Jewish History," in *Perspectives* (New York: CLAL [The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership]) 1-7. *Siblings: Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity At Their Beginnings* (New York/Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1989).

¹⁵Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987) 297.

of the Jewish people. He proposes three theses as indispensable for theological reflection: (1) "Christian theology after Auschwitz must . . . be guided by the insight that Christians can form and sufficiently understand their identity only in the face of the Jews" (2) "Because of Auschwitz, the statement 'Christians can only form and appropriately understand their identity in the face of the Jews' has been sharpened as follows: 'Christians can protect their identity only in front of and together with the history of the beliefs of the Jews'"; and (3) "Christian theology after Auschwitz must stress anew the Jewish dimension in Christian beliefs and must over come the forced blocking out of the Jewish heritage within Christianity."¹⁶

Metz also emphasizes that post-Shoah Christology needs to have *discipleship* at its very core. "This kind of Christology," he says,

is not primarily formed in a subjectless concept and system, but in discipleship stories. This kind of Christology does not bear casually, but fundamentally narrative features. This Christology of discipleship stands against a Christianity which interprets itself as a bourgeois religion; it opposes the idea that Christianity is totally at home in the bourgeois world. This Christology of discipleship also stands against that kind of Christianity which considers itself as a kind of religion of victors—with a surplus of answers and a corresponding lack of passionate questions in the being-on-the-way. This Christology of discipleship makes it clear that Christianity, too, ahead of all system knowledge contains a narrative and remembrance knowledge.¹⁷

James Moore, in his recent work *Christian Theology after the Shoah*,¹⁸ follows a christological path that bears similarities to that presented by Metz. He, too, highlights the importance of narrative Christology in light of the Shoah. For him the central determinative theme for any authentic Christology must be *resistance* within a general theology of discipleship. The rescuer becomes a prime example of true belief in the message of Christ. Any "redemptive" emphasis in Christology must always "be tied to the historical reality of any point in time, dismissing all efforts to thoroughly spiritualize the notion of redemption."¹⁹

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rebecca Chopp, both of whom have concerned themselves with the liberating dimensions of theology, offer general reflections on post-Shoah faith which carry implications for christological statements. Schüssler Fiorenza insists that we cannot speak of the suffering of the victims of the Shoah as merely "theological metaphor" for all human suffering. Rather, we

¹⁶Johannes Baptist Metz, "Facing the Jews: Christian Theology After Auschwitz," in *The Holocaust as Interruption*, Concilium 175, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and David Tracy (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984) 43-52.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁸James F. Moore, *Christian Theology after the Shoah*, Studies in the Shoah vol. 7 (Lanham MD; New York; London: University Press of America, 1993).

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 146.

must name that suffering in its political particularity. "The ideological catchword was 'Untermensch,' the less than human, the subhuman being."²⁰

Nazism for Schüssler Fiorenza represented an extreme example of the Western capitalistic form of patriarchy, with origins in Aristotelian philosophy and subsequent mediation through Christian theology. The same ancient philosophical system, imported into Christian theology by Thomas Aquinas and others, that first subjugated women as people with a "subhuman" nature combined with religious-rooted bigotry and a new bio-theology to produce the Nazi cataclysm throughout Europe. Overcoming biblical and theological anti-Judaism, so closely identified with classical christological statement, thus becomes the first step according to Schüssler Fiorenza in the complicated, rather wrenching process of cleansing Western society of its patriarchal basis.

Rebecca Chopp lays particular stress on the profound connection she perceives between Shoah literature and liberation theology, a relationship she terms unique among Western religious writings. Both perspectives in her judgment create the need for a fundamental reconceptualization of Christian theology. Christianity is now forced to grapple not merely with individual suffering, but even more with suffering on a mass scale. Liberation theology and Shoah literature both confront Christian theology with the question "who is the human subject that suffers history?"²¹

Chopp goes on to add that both liberation theology and Shoah literature force us to understand history not merely in terms of abstract notions of evolution or process but primarily in terms of the suffering realities of that history caused by various forms of human exploitation. The history that now must be the basis of theological reflection is not abstract history, but the history of human victims. And the voices and the memories of the tortured, the forgotten, and the dead must become primary resources for Christian anthropology. And, while Chopp does not explicitly articulate this position, one could surmise that she would identify with the direction taken by Schüssler Fiorenza, namely, that biblical anti-Judaism with its inevitable dehumanization of concrete Jewish persons opened the way for Jewish suffering in the Shoah and for the suffering experiences under imperialist colonialism to which liberation theology has been responding.

With the possible exception of James Moore none of the above theologians present a comprehensive Christology rooted in the experience of the Shoah. The common thread in their approach is their emphasis on the suffering of those vic-

²⁰Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and David Tracy, "The Holocaust as Interruption and the Christian Return to History," in *The Holocaust as Interruption*, ed. Fiorenza and Tracy, 86.

²¹Rebecca Chopp, "The Interruption of the Forgotten," in *The Holocaust as Interruption*, ed. Fiorenza and Tracy, 20.

timized by various forms of oppression as a focal point for christological, indeed for all theological, construction in light of the Shoah.

The other Christian theologians who have taken up the Christology-Shoah connection also emphasize suffering. But their vision revolves far more around the establishment of a linkage between the suffering of the Jewish people and other Nazi victims and Jesus' crucifixion and death.

Lutheran ethicist Franklin Sherman has uncovered in the cross of Christ "the symbol of the agonizing God." The only legitimate Christology for Sherman in light of the Shoah is one that sees in the Christ event the revelation of divine participation in the sufferings of people who are in turn summoned to take part in the sufferings of God. "We speak of God after Auschwitz," Sherman insists, "only as the one who calls us to a new unity as between Jews and Christians, but especially between Jews and Christians."²² For Sherman, Christ crucified becomes the symbol of the agonizing God. Sherman laments the fact that this symbol of the cross has become such a source of division, rather than reconciliation, between Jews and Christians throughout history. For, in fact, the cross points to a very Jewish reality—suffering and martyrdom.

The Israeli Catholic scholar Marcel Dubois moves in a vein somewhat parallel to that of Sherman.²³ He is acutely conscious of the difficulty Christians have in setting the reality of the Shoah within the context of a theology of the cross. Likewise he acknowledges that such a linkage may appear as an obscenity to Jews whose sufferings in the Shoah the Church helped to perpetrate. Yet, despite the difficulties in this approach, Dubois remained convinced it is the direction in which Christian theology ought to move:

in the person of the suffering servant there appears to take place an effable change. Our vision of Jewish destiny and our understanding of the Holocaust in particular depend on our compassion; the Calvary of the Jewish people, whose summit is the Holocaust, can help us to understand a little better the mystery of the Cross.²⁴

Douglas Hall is yet a third Christian theologian focusing post-Shoah Christological interpretations around the cross. His reflections on the Nazi period of night have left him convinced that only a theology of the cross can express the thorough meaning of the incarnation today. This christological emphasis alone establishes the authentic divine-human link implied in the Word becoming flesh by highlighting the solidarity of God with suffering humanity. Such a christologi-

²²Franklin Sherman, "Speaking of God After Auschwitz," *Worldview* 17 (1974) 29; see also Sherman's essay on the same theme in *Speaking of God Today*, ed. Paul D. Opsahl and Marc H. Tanenbaum (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974).

²³Marcel Dubois, "Christian Reflections on the Holocaust," *SIDIC (Service International de Documentation Judeo-Chrétienne)* 7/2 (1974) 15.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 15.

cal direction establishes a soteriology of solidarity which sets up the cross of Jesus as a point of fraternal union with the Jewish people, as well as with all who seek human liberation and peace.

For Hall, as for Sherman, Jesus becomes a potential source of union rather than exclusion between Jews and Christians in this post-Shoah era. He writes that

the faith of Israel is incomprehensible unless one sees at its heart a suffering God whose solidarity with humanity is so abysmal that the "cross in the heart of God" (H. Wheeler Robinson) must always be incarnating itself in history. Reading the words of Elie Wiesel, one knows, as a Christian, that he bears this indelible resemblance to the people of Israel.²⁵

Finally, we come to the writings of Jürgen Moltmann where we find the most comprehensive treatment of the Christology-Shoah link to date. Moltmann interprets the Shoah as the most dramatic revelation thus far of the basic meaning of the Christ event—God can save people, including Israel, because through the cross he participated in their very suffering. To theologize after the Shoah would prove a futile enterprise in Moltmann's view,

were not the *Sh'ma Israel* and the Lord's Prayer prayed in Auschwitz itself, were not God himself in Auschwitz, suffering with the martyred and murdered. Every other answer would be blasphemy. An absolute God would make us indifferent. The God of action and success would let us forget the dead, which we still cannot forget. God as nothingness would make the entire world into a concentration camp.²⁶

What emerges for Moltmann from the experience of the Shoah is a "theology of divine vulnerability" which has deep roots in both rabbinic theology and in Abraham Joshua Heschel's notion *divine pathos*. This "theology of divine vulnerability" clearly provides an important starting point for a post-Shoah Christology. For one, it establishes the close link between Christology and the more fundamental God-problem. It likewise opens up the whole question of dual responsibility—divine and human—during the Shoah.

As we begin to evaluate these initial efforts to develop a Christology rooted in the Shoah experience the approaches suggested by both of the above groups of theologians, though contributing significantly, remain incomplete. In my judgment the outlook of the second group with its stress on linking the sufferings of Christ with that of the Nazi victims is the more problematic. The first represents an important initial step in fashioning one of the necessary components of such a Christology. It is to an amplification of these two component elements that we now turn our attention.

²⁵Douglas Hall, "Rethinking Christ," in *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davies (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 183.

²⁶Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God," *Theology Today* 32 (April 1974) 9. See also *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

Any adequate Christology after the Shoah must be directly related to the more fundamental discussion about God in the light of this experience. This is something that few Christian theologians have done to date. Hence, my effort at developing a post-Shoah Christology necessarily begins with a brief overview on how I now understand the reality of the God-human person relationship.²⁷

The fundamental reality that has emerged from my research into the Shoah is the new sense of human freedom present among the Nazi theoreticians. The Nazis had correctly assessed modern human experience in at least one crucial respect. They rightly understood that profound changes were at work in human consciousness. Under the impact of the new science and technology, the human community was starting to undergo a transformation that can aptly be termed a "Prometheus Unbound" experience. An awareness was beginning to build of a degree of human autonomy and power greater than most of Christian theology had allowed for in the past.

In the Nazi perception the possibility now existed to reshape human society, perhaps humanity itself, to an extent never previously imaginable. This new possibility created a concomitant responsibility—to liberate humankind from the "polluters" of authentic humanity, the dregs of society, as these were arbitrarily determined by the master race. People began to use death to solve the problem of human existence. As Uriel Tal has maintained, the "final solution" was intended to address an universal crisis of the human person. It sought a total transformation of human values at the heart of which was the loosening from the "shackles" of the historic God-idea with its attendant notions of moral responsibility, redemption, sin and revelation.

In light of the Holocaust and related examples of the brutal, systematic use of human power it is incumbent upon contemporary Christianity to affirm the new freedom that is continuing to dawn within humankind while channeling it into humanly constructive outlets. Post-Shoah Christian faith must fully recognize and welcome developments in the sense of human liberation as a positive part of the process of human salvation. But the Nazi experience will of necessity muffle any wild applause for this new sense of human freedom. The challenge facing Christianity is whether it can now provide an understanding and experience of the God-human person relationship which can guide this newly discovered power and freedom constructively and creatively. Somehow faith encounter and faith expression today must be such that it prevents the newly dis-

²⁷For a full exposition of my views on the God-question after the Shoah, see my writings, as follows: *The Challenge of the Holocaust for Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Anti-Defamation League, 1982); "Christian Ethics and the Holocaust: A Dialogue with Post-Auschwitz Judaism," *Theological Studies* 49 (1988) 649-69; and "The Shoah: Continuing Theological Challenge for Christianity," in *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses*, ed. Steven L. Jacobs (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1993) 139-65.

covered creative power of humanity from being transformed into the destructive force we met head-on during the Shoah.

For this to happen in a meaningful way we shall have to recover a new sense of transcendence. Men and women will once again need to experience contact with a power beyond themselves, a power that heals the destructive tendencies still lurking within humanity. The Shoah has destroyed simplistic notions of a "commanding," all powerful God. But equally it has exposed our desperate need to retain a sense of a "compelling" God, *compelling* because we have experienced through symbolic encounter with this God a healing, a strengthening, an affirming that buries any need to assert our humanity through the destructive, even deathly, use of human power. It is a God to whom we are drawn, rather than a God who imposes on us. The role of God, however, must be understood, despite its new limitations, in a more activist sense than that implied, for example, in Richard Rubenstein's focus on "Holy Nothingness" stemming from his protracted experience with Japanese Buddhists. Perhaps the notion of the "Spirit" might be usefully explored in this vein.

With this understanding of how the Shoah has impacted the God question in our time, we can move on to a discussion of Christology. Understanding the ministry of Jesus as emerging from the heightened sense of divine-human intimacy that surfaced in the Pharisaic revolution in Second Temple Judaism, christological claims made by the Church in reflection on that ministry can be seen as attempts to articulate a new sense of how profoundly humanity is imbedded in the divinity. The ultimate significance of Christology so understood lies in its revelation of the grandeur of the human as a necessary corrective to the demeaning paternalism that often characterized the sense of the divine-human relationship in the past. In this sense all authentic Christology is ultimately theological anthropology. As Gregory Baum has stressed in commenting on Pope John Paul II's first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, human dignity is presented as integral to christological doctrine in the papal perspective.²⁸

In my view the fear and paternalism associated in the past with the statement of the divine-human relationship were at least partially responsible for the attempt by the Nazis to produce a total reversal of human meaning, as Tal put it. Incarnational Christology can help the human person understand that he or she shares in the very life and existence of God. The human person remains creature; the gulf between humanity in people and humanity in the Godhead has not been totally overcome. But it is also clear that a direct link exists; the two humanities can touch. The human struggle for self-identity vis-à-vis the Creator God, the source of the misuse of human power in the past, has come to an end in principle, though its full realization still lies ahead. In this sense we can truly affirm

²⁸Gregory Baum, "The First Papal Encyclical," *The Ecumenist* 17 (May/June 1979) 55.

that Christ continues to bring humankind salvation in its root meaning—*wholeness*.

With a proper understanding of the meaning of the Christ event men and women can be healed, they can finally overcome the primal sin of pride, the desire to supplant the Creator in power and in status that lay at the heart of the Shoah. Critical to this awareness is the sense of God's self-imposed limitation manifested in the cross. This is where Moltmann's theology can make a significant contribution. The notion of "divine vulnerability" can become a powerful christological myth to remind us that one need not exercise power, control and dominance to be "godly." It also shows that God is simply not desirous of absorbing humanity totally back into the divine being, but rather affirming its eternal distinctiveness. That is the ultimate message of the resurrection, rather than the triumphalistic interpretations given the event which A. Roy Eckardt and others have rightly criticized in light of the Shoah.

But let me say that if the notion of "divine vulnerability" is to serve in the above way it must be disassociated from direct linkages to Jewish sufferings above all, as well as the sufferings of other victims of the Nazis. From a theological perspective Jesus' suffering must be regarded as voluntary and redeeming. No such claims can be made in good conscience for the sufferings endured by Nazi victims. And on the human level it is difficult to compare the depth of suffering endured by the Jews, Gypsies, Poles, gays, and others with that of Jesus, as painful as it might have been.

What I am claiming is that the Shoah represents at one and the same time the ultimate expression of human freedom and evil—the two are intimately linked. The ultimate assertion of human freedom from God in our time that the Holocaust represents may in fact prove the beginning of the final resolution of the conflict between freedom and evil. When humanity finally recognizes the destruction it can produce in totally rejecting dependence on its Creator, as it did in the Shoah, when it perceives that such rejection is a perversion and not an affirmation of human freedom, a new stage in human consciousness may be dawning. We may finally be coming to grips with evil at its roots. The power of evil will wane only when humankind develops along with a profound sense of the dignity it enjoys because of its direct links to God a corresponding sense of humility occasioned by a searching encounter with the devastation it is capable of producing when left to its own wits. A sense of profound humility evoked by the experience of the healing power present in the ultimate Creator of human power—this is crucial. On this point of humility as a critical response to the Shoah experience I join with Stanley Hauerwas in his reflections on the Shoah even though we part company on several implications of the event.²⁹ Clearly a

²⁹Stanley Hauerwas, "Jews and Christians Among the Nations," *Cross Currents* 31 (Spring 1981) 34.

Christology focused on divine vulnerability will enhance this process considerably.

The relation between post-Shoah human consciousness and Christology is something on which I have written previously.³⁰ I now see that, as central as it remains, by itself this approach is incomplete. Here is where the inchoative reflections of that group of Christian scholars discussed above who emphasize the human response dimension of a post-Shoah Christology assume great significance. Clearly the emphasis by Rebecca Chopp and David Tracy on person-centered theology, on a theology that directly relates to the victims of current history, is very much to the point as I now understand the significance of the Shoah. Christology needs to become more than a theoretical affirmation of the human dignity that, in the words of John Paul II, lay at the heart of authentic Christology. It must also become the impetus for a concrete manifestation of that belief through identification with, and support of, the victims of oppression through personal and political means. This will enhance the dignity not only of the victim, but also of the person who reaches out. Only through this kind of bonding can the instinctive patriarchal impulse, rooted in relationships based on power rather than mutuality, be overcome and a central force for the continued misuse of technological capacity be neutralized. Only in this way can we guarantee that killing will never again become a force for supposed human healing.

In this approach to Christology the emphasis on Jesus' sufferings on the cross surely has a place. But this suffering must not be seen in isolation from his public ministry. For it is the period of the public ministry where Jesus often went out of his way to identify with, and personally affirm, the social outcasts of his time that gives significance to his experience on the cross. His continual affirmation of human dignity in very concrete ways is what brought him a death sentence.

In a recent volume I find particularly perceptive and challenging Vytautas Kavolis, distinguished professor of Comparative Civilizations and Sociology at Dickinson College, argues that while the sacred will continue to impact culture it will do so in a different way. In *Moralizing Cultures*³¹ Kavolis speaks of a movement towards the "humanization of morality." This movement involves a fundamental shift from the dominance of abstract principles requiring adherence, whatever the consequences, to a more directly practical concern with the reduction of human suffering and the enhancement of nondestructive capacities within humanity. For this to continue in a socially constructive way, we require moral leaders as much as, perhaps more, than abstract principles.

³⁰John T. Pawlikowski, "The Holocaust and Contemporary Christology," in *The Holocaust as Interruption*, ed. Fiorenza and Tracy, 43-49.

³¹Vytautas Kavolis, *Moralizing Cultures* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1993).

Applying Kavolis' perspective to Christology after the Shoah we can say that Jesus' own ministry becomes one such example of moral leadership. But so does the witness of the countless martyrs, whether in the Shoah itself or subsequently, who have embodied Christology in acts of concrete witness on behalf of the oppressed. The personal, and even communal, "cleansing" of human consciousness from the temptations towards the destructive use of enhanced human power is a necessary first step in my judgment in the humanization of morality. But the process cannot stop. If reflection on the Shoah leaves us merely with a theology of divine vulnerability and does not take us to a Christology of witness we have failed in our basic responsibility as post-Shoah Christians.

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