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Emancipation from the Whirlwind: Piety and Rebellion among Jewish-American Post-Holocaust and Christian Liberation Readings of Job

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See, he will kill me; I have no hope
[Job 13:15 – NRSV]

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him
[Job 13:15 – King James]

Translators of these words in which Job assesses his relationship with God face a difficult choice. On the one hand, the Masoretic text of the Hebrew points to the more resigned portrayal of Job followed by the NRSV. On the other, a phonetically insignificant amendment to the Hebrew proposed in the margins of the text by ancient rabbis points to the hopeful meaning followed by the King James. Faced with his own innocent suffering, whether Job trusts or despairs in God pivots upon the change of a single barely audible letter.¹

Such fissures characterize the Book of Job. Most significant is the division between Job's two responses to his torments: the piety of his sparse words in the two prose chapters that begin the book and the rebelliousness that characterizes many of his laments within its poetic dialogues. Robert Gordis notes that there are "two radically different Jobs in the biblical masterpiece. One is the hero of the prose tale, whose righteousness is matched by his piety and who retains his faith and patience under the gravest of provocations. The other is the Job of the dialogue, a passionate rebel against the injustice of undeserved suffering, who challenges God Himself."²

This article focuses upon the manner in which theologians responding to two distinct episodes of innocent suffering in

¹ The Masoretic text (Kethiv) of Jb 13:15 contains ׀ל (no, not) while the notes for the verse's oral reading (Qere) changes this to ל' (to him).

² Robert Gordis, *The Book of God and Man: A Study of Job* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 219.

the modern world have interacted with this biblical text's fissures. The first of these episodes is the extermination of around six million European Jews in the event commonly called 'the Holocaust.' The second is the suffering of the oppressed in Latin America and Africa. The following will focus upon seven Jewish and Christian theologians to have written in response to these two contexts and engaged with the Book of Job within their thoughts.

It is worth clarifying with regard to the Jewish post-Holocaust reception of Job that the following will engage with theologians writing texts focused *primarily* upon this event, rather than 'post-Holocaust' merely in the temporal sense.³ These three thinkers write in varying relation to the movement often labeled 'Holocaust theology,' widely considered, in a Jewish context,⁴ to have only begun in earnest with Richard Rubenstein's seminal 1966 work *After Auschwitz*,⁵ and parallel with the greater awareness of the event within particularly American consciousness that

³ Thus while Gordis' commentary noted above might be described as a Jewish post-Holocaust reading of Job in the temporal sense, it can in no way be aligned with Holocaust theology.

⁴ There is also the phenomenon of Christian 'Holocaust theology.' A useful overview of this is provided by Stephen R. Haynes, "Christian Holocaust Theology: A Critical Reassessment," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 52, 2 (1994): 553-585. While Jewish Holocaust theology is concerned with issues of innocent suffering, Christian Holocaust theology's *primary* emphases are quite different: considering Christianity's traditions of anti-Jewish sentiment and the role of Christian individuals and institutions before and during the Holocaust.

⁵ Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (London: Collier MacMillan, 1966). Michael Berenbaum reflects that "*After Auschwitz* was the first work to connect the two events [the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel] as revolutions that required a rethinking of conventional wisdom ... no one can proceed to work in the field without wrestling with Rubenstein's premises and his conclusions." "Explorations and Responses: Richard Lowell Rubenstein: A Renegade Son is Honored at Home," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 25, 2 (1988): 264.

historians such as Peter Novick identify having developed in the 1960s and early 1970s.⁶ What is shared between both liberation theology and Jewish Holocaust theology is a grounding in events of innocent suffering in the modern world. The relationship between them, however, has not always been without tensions. Alongside Jewish suspicions of supersessionist thought in liberation theology,⁷ and the ever present potential for competitive victimhood,⁸ have been notable differences regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

These differences are particularly clear when comparing two contributions to the 1991 book *Judaism, Christianity & Liberation*. In his chapter, Rubenstein notes the degree of agreement across Jewish response to the Holocaust

⁶ Peter Novick describes the 1960s and early 1970s as the 'Years of Transition' with regard to the place of Holocaust memory in American consciousness in *The Holocaust and Collective Memory: The American Experience* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 127-203.

⁷ Note Marc H. Ellis' comment that "In most liberation theologies the Jewish Exodus is used as a paradigm of revolution, but contemporary Jews are nowhere to be found in the writings of the theologians. This continues the age-old Christian tradition of seeing the Jewish people as bequeathing the 'Old Testament' and Jesus and then disappearing into history, their mission accomplished. The use of the Jewish story is coupled with our historical invisibility." *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (London: SCM, 1987), 71-72.

⁸ Gustavo Gutiérrez reflects that for "Latin Americans the question is not precisely 'How are we to do theology after Auschwitz?' The reason is that in Latin America we are still experiencing every day the violation of human rights, murder, and the torture that we find so blameworthy in the Jewish holocaust of World War II." *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: Orbis, 1987), 102. Depending upon one's view of the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust – a concept to which many Jewish Holocaust theologians ascribe to a considerable degree – Gutiérrez's comments may be viewed as anywhere between innocuous common-sense or an offensive belittling of both the radical nature of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust and the need for Christian introspection in the event's aftermath.

regarding the priority given to the security of the state of Israel. He makes this point in the following quotation, referring approvingly to the Orthodox theologian Irving Greenberg's view of this matter:

[A]chieving sufficient power to guarantee the survival of the state of Israel, insofar as such a guarantee is humanly possible, has been elevated by Greenberg to a sacred principle. In the post-Holocaust period, endangering that power becomes the closest thing to an unpardonable sin for Judaism...there is something close to unanimity on this point among the Holocaust theologians.⁹

While, as will be noted below, there have been some Jewish theologians to have questioned this view, Rubenstein is correct to note that Jewish Holocaust theology has most often been defensive of Israel's security. Michael Morgan, commenting upon the role of the Holocaust in Jewish-American thought notes that the 1967 Six Day War was a decisive watershed in this regard; a point after which many Jews became disillusioned with a Left critical of Israel's actions.¹⁰

A severely different view to Rubenstein's is taken by the Uruguayan liberation theologian Julio de Santa Ana in his chapter in *Judaism, Christianity & Liberation*:

[T]heology of liberation challenges the theology of the Holocaust...This fear and the bitterness from the sufferings at the hands of fascist Nazism were extremely important factors that led Israel to adopt the behavior of its

⁹ Richard L. Rubenstein, "Jews, Israel, and Liberation Theology," in *Judaism, Christianity & Liberation: An Agenda for Dialogue*, ed. Otto Maduro (New York: Orbis, 1991), 101.

¹⁰ Michael L. Morgan, *Beyond Auschwitz: Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 79-90.

former oppressors...Most of the so-called 'theology of the Holocaust' defends (granted, with nuances) that reactionary attitude of the state of Israel. It tries to legitimate it theologically.¹¹

This controversial (and historically dubious) suggestion that Israel has treated the Palestinians in a manner synonymous with Nazi treatment of the Jews demonstrates a stark contrast between liberation theology and Jewish Holocaust theology. Liberation theology, with its associations with Marxism, has historically been characterized by political radicalism and a suspicion of those with power. Jewish post-Holocaust theology has in America, as Morgan notes, been often associated with more politically conservative views.¹² This contrast is, it should be stressed, rather unsurprising. While liberation theologians have faced ongoing oppression in the developing world, the main focus of Holocaust theologians has been an event of suffering in the past to which a major part of the answer is continuing Jewish survival in the form of a strong Jewish state. If liberation theologians are concerned with the plight of the powerless, Jewish Holocaust theologians are concerned that Jewish powerlessness of the past – powerlessness that culminated in the Holocaust – is not allowed to return.

Political conservatism or radicalism does not, however, necessarily correspond to theology. Indeed, the following consideration of how these two groups of theologians have utilized the Book of Job will be framed by the

¹¹ Julio de Santa Ana, "The Holocaust and Liberation," in *Judaism, Christianity & Liberation: An Agenda for Dialogue*, trans. Terrence Cambias, ed. Otto Maduro (New York: Orbis, 1991), 49.

¹² Morgan writes that "there is no necessary connection between post-Holocaust Jewish thought and political conservatism, but to some, in the seventies and thereafter, there has seemed to be such an alliance." *Beyond Auschwitz*, 262.

following proposal: that Holocaust theology, while politically conservative, has often been theologically radical; and conversely, that liberation theology, while politically radical, has often been theologically conservative. The following will attempt to uncover whether this model is reflected in the manner in which a number of theologians from liberation theology and Jewish Holocaust theology read this biblical text.

With regard to this model it is worth briefly pausing however to clarify the use of the terms 'radical' and particularly 'conservative' in the context of what follows. Support for the security of the state of Israel is here labeled as 'conservative' only insofar as being inherently committed to *conserving* the state's present status from perceived threats. This commitment may, of course, be made by many who legitimately consider themselves 'progressive' or even 'radical' in all manner of other social issues. Yet it remains nonetheless distinct from the orientation of those associated with liberation theology, since for liberationists it is those presently holding power who are frequently perceived as oppressors. It is on this *specific* level of relationships with power that this article utilizes the terms 'conservative' and 'radical'. As shall be discussed in relation to interpretation of Job however, either the support or critique of power where it presently resides does not correspond neatly to all social, or especially in the case of this study, all *theological* outlooks.

Within liberation theology the Book of Job is not, it is fair to say, the most commonly cited text from the Hebrew Bible. Prophetic literature and the story of the Exodus have seemingly had greater resonance for this strand of modern Christian thought.¹³ It should be noted that in Christian

¹³ For a discussion of the biblical texts most frequently appealed to in liberationist thought see Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential*

thought Job's status as archetypal figure of innocent suffering is inevitably overshadowed by Jesus' sufferings in the New Testament. Perhaps because this overshadowing obviously does not apply to Jewish thought, within theological responses to the Holocaust references to Job abound. Indeed, it should be stated that a provisional character colors this study in that by necessity not all Jewish post-Holocaust treatments of Job will be discussed at length (though several not discussed in detail will be noted in passing). The three Jewish thinkers discussed below have been chosen, not because they are the three most prominent to have considered the Holocaust (though Elie Wiesel might in fact be the *most* prominent), but rather because their readings of Job in this context make for fruitful comparison with four liberation theologians discussed here who *have* engaged significantly with Job rather than the more commonly cited biblical texts with liberation theology.

The discussion of the seven theologian's engagements with this text will be divided into three sections, each concerned with particular themes and elements which may be drawn from consideration of the Book of Job. The first of these is Job in relation to issues of innocent suffering and human freewill.

1. Job and Freewill for Elsa Tamez, Gustavo Gutiérrez and Eliezer Berkovits

Jewish and Christian thought have, through their histories, furnished theology with many models for response to the problem of evil. One of the most oft-cited has been the appeal to human freewill. God may abhor suffering, it is argued, but is duty bound not to intervene (not always at

Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond (London: I. B. Taurus & Co, 1987), 45-62.

least) so that humans can exist in a moral realm in which meaningful ethical choices can be made (this is sometimes referred to as a 'free will defense'). This section of the article will focus upon three theologians writing in the 1970s and 1980s who have, in varying ways, engaged with the figure of Job while appealing to the necessity of freewill within their responses to modern episodes of innocent suffering. The first two, Elsa Tamez and Gustavo Gutiérrez, have been associated with liberation theology in Latin America. The third, Eliezer Berkovits, was one of the key Jewish-American theologians to respond to the Holocaust.

Elsa Tamez is a Methodist theologian from Mexico who has responded to the plight of the oppressed in Latin America with an emphasis on the perspective of women, reflecting Gerald West's statement that within liberation theology "Bible study begins with the needs and concerns of poor and marginalized communities."¹⁴ Her work that will be focused upon here, entitled "A Letter to Job," is a very short contribution to the 1986 book *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*.¹⁵

As noted above, the figure of Job presents an archetypal model of piety in the response he gives to his torments in the first two chapters of the book, but in the poetic dialogues that follow, presents a more rebellious response to innocent suffering. Note, for example, his words regarding God in 9:22-2:

¹⁴ Gerald West, "The Bible and the Poor: A New Way of Doing Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 145.

¹⁵ Elsa Tamez, "A Letter to Job," in *New Eyes for Reading: Biblical and Theological Reflections by Women from the Third World*, ed. John S. Pobee and Berbel von Wartenberg-Potter (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1986).

I say,
 he destroys both the blameless
 and the wicked.
 When disaster brings sudden death,
 he mocks at the calamity of
 the innocent.
 The earth is given into the hands of
 the wicked;
 he covers the eyes of its judges –
 if it is not he, who then is it?¹⁶

In the early sections of “A Letter to Job” it is this depiction of Job as a theological rebel that Tamez admires in her consideration of the book’s meaning for the oppressed of Latin America:

How brave you are, brother Job! How strong is your resistance! You are, like us, sick, abandoned, rejected and oppressed. Your friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar haven’t ceased to torture you and give you poor advice. They say that you should suffer in silence and stop defending your innocence. They say that God has punished you and that you need to repent. And you, brother Job, in spite of everything, you haven’t given up. Rather, your shouts have become louder. You don’t believe them and you fight them. What’s more, you dare to argue and wrestle with Almighty God. You blame God for your plight, and you accuse the Almighty of keeping silence in the face of your suffering. Once your friend, now God seems to have abandoned you. You don’t understand why. You insist that you have been just and innocent. It is

¹⁶ NRSV translation. Unless part of a quotation, all verses cited below are also from the NRSV.

the right of every man and woman to cry out against unjust suffering.¹⁷

Here the most theologically radical elements of the Book of Job have been appropriated by Tamez: Job’s rebellious lament against the silence of God.

Quite suddenly, however, the tone of Tamez’s letter changes markedly. From having backed Job’s laments she ushers him to be still so that God can provide an explanation for His silence:

But let us be still as well, Job. Let’s not complain any more. We have complained enough already. Your wise words silenced the wise of your time. They had no more arguments. God would not back them. Let the Almighty God stand before us and explain why for so long there has been such silence.¹⁸

The explanation that Tamez then proceeds to provide for God’s silence in the face of human suffering is not without some significant difficulties. Whilst on the one hand declaring that this silence is mysterious, she also provides a distinctly *explicable* analysis. This is the necessity of freewill:

God’s silence is mysterious. Sometimes it fills us with fright...But without this silence of God we can’t become men and women...God remains silent so that people may really become people. When God is silent and men and women cry, God cries in solidarity with them, but God doesn’t intervene. God waits for the shouts of protest. Then the Almighty begins to speak again, but in dialogue with us.

¹⁷ Tamez, “A Letter to Job,” 50.

¹⁸ Tamez, “A Letter to Job,” 51.

God shows us how the mountain goat casts away her new-born and they find their way on the rocks and don't return looking for the mother's milk.¹⁹

It is difficult to summarize the meaning of these words with their reference to a non-intervening God symbolized by a mother who casts away her child for its own benefit without the sense that something closely akin to a free will defense is at play – “God remains silent so that people may really become people.” With this defense of God's silence and non-intervention in human suffering Tamez ultimately brings resolution to Job's plight in her letter, declaring that “Now, brother Job, you have seen God, really come to know God.”²⁰

This ‘resolution’ is perhaps unsurprising given her view, stated in a separate publication, that the Bible in liberation theology overall “speaks of a loving, just, liberating God who accompanies the poor in their suffering and their struggle through human history.”²¹ With this undergirding outlook at play, Job's *rebellion* against divine injustice was, in Tamez's reading, perhaps always likely to be overcome.

An analogous reading of the Book of Job is provided by her fellow liberationist, the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez. Like Tamez, Gutiérrez's 1987 work *On Job: God-talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* is focused upon Job's meaning for the plight of the oppressed in Latin America.²²

¹⁹ Tamez, “A Letter to Job,” 51.

²⁰ Tamez, “A Letter to Job,” 52.

²¹ Elsa Tamez, “Women's Rereading of the Bible,” in *Feminist Theology from the Third World*, ed. Ursula King (London and New York: SPCK/Orbis, 1994), 190.

²² In his introduction Gutiérrez writes “In this reading of the Book of Job I shall keep my attention on what it means to talk of God in the context of Latin America, and more concretely in the context of the suffering of the poor – which is to say, the vast majority of the population.” *On Job*, xviii.

His commentary is, though, considerably more sustained than her brief letter and some of its nuances will be necessarily overlooked in the present study.

Like Tamez, Gutiérrez notes that Job, at times, fiercely rebels against divine injustice. He notes that “His full encounter with God comes by way of complaint, bewilderment, and confrontation” and that “He feels harassed by the God in whom he believes.”²³ However, at other times in his commentary Gutiérrez appears to downplay Job's rebellion against God, suggesting that his defiance is directed more at the false theology of his friends than God:

Job...is a rebellious believer. His rebellion is against the suffering of the innocent, against a theology that justifies it, and even against *the depiction* of God that such a theology conveys.²⁴

Job...will never say that God is unjust. Instead of speaking ill of the God in whom he believes, he challenges the foundations of the prevailing theology.²⁵

Gutiérrez's Job is a rebellious one, but with regard to God, this is only partially so. He notes, for example, the protagonist's defiant words of 9:22-24 cited above, but reflects only that “Job seems *close* here to speaking ill of God.”²⁶ After Job declares that God “destroys innocent and guilty alike” (9:22), Gutiérrez's analysis seems curiously tentative. It is to be suspected that his reticence is related to the fact that, just as Tamez ultimately ushers Job into

²³ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 55 and 63.

²⁴ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 14. Emphasis mine.

²⁵ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 30.

²⁶ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 57. Emphasis mine.

silence, Gutiérrez believes that God provides a satisfactory explanation for the suffering Job rebels against, even if, similarly to Tamez, he initially refers to suffering as “the impenetrable human mystery.”²⁷

The explanation Gutiérrez invokes relates especially to God’s words to Job out of the whirlwind in 40:9-14:

Have you an arm like God,
and can you thunder with a
voice like his?
“Deck yourself with majesty and
dignity;
clothe yourself with glory and
splendor.
Pour out the overflowings of your
anger,
and look on all who are proud,
and abase them.
Look on all who are proud, and
bring them low;
tread down the wicked where
they stand.
Hide them all in the dust together;
bind their faces in the world below.
Then I will acknowledge to you
that your own right hand can
give you victory.

In these words God is conventionally understood to be underlining Job’s limitations – he cannot, of course, do those things God is proposing. Gutiérrez, however, reads these verses in a different manner. He proposes instead that God is pointing to a reality underpinned by a theodicy of freewill not dissimilar to that referred to by Tamez:

²⁷ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 13.

[T]he Lord is explaining, tenderly and, as it were, shyly that the wicked cannot be simply be destroyed with a glance. God wants justice indeed, and desires that divine judgment...reign in the world; but God cannot impose it, for the nature of created being must be respected. God’s power is limited by human freedom.²⁸

God is not so much referring to Job’s limitations but rather, according to Gutiérrez’s reading, His own limitations in the face of necessary human freedom. Again citing a mysteriousness that he is simultaneously dissolving, he continues by stating that “the all-powerful God is also a ‘weak’ God. The mystery of divine freedom leads to the mystery of human freedom.”²⁹

For both Tamez and Gutiérrez their readings of the Book of Job in the face of innocent suffering in Latin America are framed ultimately around a perceived necessity for freewill, appeals that render Job’s rebellion, if not inappropriate, certainly not the last word. Both theologians find, through appeals to human freedom, routes towards resolution with God *beyond* Job’s defiance.

A figure that similarly asserts a theodicy of human freewill is the Jewish Orthodox theologian Eliezer Berkovits in his 1973 work *Faith after the Holocaust*. As was noted above, this study will not attempt to discuss all engagements with the Book of Job within Jewish Holocaust theology at length (though Berkovits’ relationship to some broader trends within Jewish post-Holocaust receptions of Job’s rebellion will be mentioned in passing). Where Berkovits’ reading is of *particular* interest for the present discussion is in its appeal

²⁸ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 77.

²⁹ Gutiérrez, *On Job*, 77-78.

to a version of the free will defense not wholly dissimilar to those alluded by Tamez and Gutiérrez.

Faith after the Holocaust is a work that supports significantly Rubenstein's assessment that within Jewish Holocaust theology support for the security of the state of Israel is 'a sacred principle.' Written shortly after the 1967 Six Day War, Berkovits sees this event as no less than an episode of divine intervention by God on behalf of the Jewish people, "an event not on a purely man-made level of history, but one that took place in conformity with the divine plan."³⁰

Yet the central force behind his motivations for writing this book is a recognition that during the Holocaust, God *did not* intervene to save six million Jews. In the face of this, Berkovits appeals to a theodicy of freewill to explain the only intermittent nature of God's interventions in history. Since the potential for meaningful ethical decisions requires human freedom, he asserts, more than once in his book, that to ask "why is there evil?" is equivalent to asking "why is there man?"³¹ In his view, the reason for human existence – and freedom – is to sanctify the name of God. He writes that "within the God-given task of sanctification, is the source of man's freedom as well as his responsibility...Granting him freedom and calling him to responsibility, God has expressed his confidence in his creature, man."³²

One might expect Berkovits' reading of Job to ultimately overcome his rebelliousness in a manner synonymous with Tamez and Gutiérrez. Yet this is not the case. Berkovits' reading of Job covers only a few pages of *Faith after the Holocaust*. What is notable however is that Job's rebellion

³⁰ Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith after the Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1973), 153.

³¹ Berkovits, *Faith*, 105 and 103.

³² Berkovits, *Faith*, 61.

against God is ultimately upheld as a model for post-Holocaust Jewish faith. Like Tamez and (to a lesser extent) Gutiérrez, Berkovits is conscious of the rebellious nature of Job's comments in the poetic dialogues. Job's lament, he notes, is fundamentally triggered by his faith that God *should* be just: "It is the very power of the faith that lends force to the accusation. What has happened to Job is wrong; it is terribly wrong because it is judged by the ideal of justice that Job formed for himself on the strength of his faith in God."³³

When interpreting the resonance of Job's defiance Berkovits is aware of two sets of divisions that consideration of post-Holocaust faith must recognize: firstly, the division between those who kept and those who lost their faith during the event, and secondly, the division between those who experienced it and those who did not. It is the first of these divisions he has in mind in the following quotation:

There were really two Jobs at Auschwitz: the one who belatedly accepted the advice of Job's wife and turned his back on God, and the other who kept his faith to the end, who affirmed it at the very doors of the gas chambers... Those who rejected did so in authentic rebellion; those who affirmed and testified to the very end did so in authentic faith.³⁴

The experience of both these groups is something that Berkovits considers closed off from those who did not experience the Holocaust:

Neither the authenticity of rebellion nor the authenticity of faith is available to those who are only Job's brother. The outsider, the brother of the martyrs, enters a confusing

³³ Berkovits, *Faith*, 68.

³⁴ Berkovits, *Faith*, 69.

heritage. He inherits both the rebellion and the witness of the martyrs: a rebellion not silenced by the witness; a witness not made void by the rebellion. In our generation, Job's brother, if he wishes to be true to his God-given heritage, 'reasons' with God in believing rebellion and rebellious belief.³⁵

For those whom did not experience this event (who Berkovits characterizes as Job's brother) there remains the legacy of faith during the Holocaust having been both rejected *and* sustained. With the need to respect both, they are thus left with a Job-like rebellious faith. Leaving aside the question of what those who lost their faith would think of their legacy being represented as 'rebellious belief,' what is notable for present concerns is that defiance against God, for Berkovits, *remains*, although it never amounts to a rejection of faith.

Yet there seems to be an apparent tension between his emphasis upon the need for human freewill and a post-Holocaust faith that encompasses Job-like defiance. Why rebel against a divinity that has created the freewill necessary for meaningful human life and is thus duty bound to (at least sometimes) abstain from interference?

The answer lies in fact that even if Berkovits believes free will to be necessary, he is still not entirely willing to forgive the innocent suffering experienced by the Jewish people during the Holocaust. The following quotation is notable in this regard:

[A]ll this does not exonerate God for all the suffering of the innocent in history. God is responsible for having created a world in which man is free to make human history. There must be a dimension beyond history in which all suffering

³⁵ Berkovits, *Faith*, 69.

finds redemption through God...This is no justification for the ways of providence, but its acceptance. It is not a willingness to forgive the unheard cries of millions, but a trust that in God the tragedy of man may find its transformation. Within time and history that cry is unforgivable.³⁶

This quotation requires a degree of unraveling. In it Berkovits appears to be making three assertions: (a) that in "a dimension beyond history" there will be some redemption for suffering, (b) that God has created a world in which human freedom is responsible for history, though (c) that within history God should not be wholly forgiven for suffering. His notion of "a dimension beyond history" in which suffering is redeemed (a) is not particularly developed in *Faith after the Holocaust* and will be overlooked in the present discussion. What is of greater importance is the relationship he posits between a theodicy of freewill (b) and the forgiveness of God (c). Berkovits' certainly possesses a faith in the need for human freedom and responsibility in human history, including the Holocaust, but this does not extend far enough for him to wholly forgive God for this event. Job's rebellion remains resonant for Berkovits in the face of innocent suffering to an extent greater than for Tamez and Gutiérrez.

While not sharing Berkovits' appeals to a free will defense, several Jewish thinkers associated with Holocaust theology share his empathy with Job's rebellion. Perhaps most notable among these is Elie Wiesel, whose reading of this biblical text will be focused upon in the next section of this article. A more recent example is presented by David Blumenthal in his 1993 work *Facing the Abusing God* in which, declaring the need for post-Holocaust Jews to question God, he reflects that "The theology of protest goes

³⁶ Berkovits, *Faith*, 136.

back to the Bible and is present most forcefully in the Book of Job.”³⁷

Returning however to Berkovits, Tamez and Gutiérrez, these three examples support the thesis that, in their readings of the Book of Job, Jewish Holocaust theologians, while politically more conservative, are more theologically radical than liberation theologians in that the radical implications of Job’s rebellion are more sustained. However, to see whether this pattern continues, focus shall now be placed upon a quite different theme: the significance in Job of Satan.

2. The figure of Satan for Enrique Dussel and Elie Wiesel

In the Book of Job the figure of Satan (perhaps rendered more accurately ‘the satan’ or ‘the accuser’) occupies a somewhat strange role. After questioning whether Job’s

³⁷ David Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 250-251. A somewhat more ambiguous appraisal of Job’s rebellion is provided by Emil Fackenheim in his 1970 work *God’s Presence in History* in which he admires Job’s ability to rebel “within the sphere of faith” but nonetheless worries that for contemporary Jews such protest may “escalate into a totally destructive conflict.” *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections* (Northvale, New Jersey and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1970), 76. A more curious example is presented by Richard Rubenstein in a 1970 article entitled “Job and Auschwitz” in which he declares the biblical book to be of little post-Holocaust resonance because, in contrast to Job’s vociferous rebellion, “most inmates [in the camps] were so totally assaulted both emotionally and physically that they were incapable of maintaining a sense of their own adult integrity and dignity.” Leaving aside the historical questions raised by this psychological analysis, what is notable for present concerns is that despite viewing the Holocaust’s legacy quite differently Berkovits, Wiesel and Blumenthal, Rubenstein nonetheless still perceives Job in terms of a figure of archetypal rebellion. “Job and Auschwitz,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 25 (1970): 433-434.

piety is simply the result of his successful life, and gaining permission from God to remove Job’s family, wealth, and ultimately his health, he disappears completely from the narrative. After the second chapter of the book, this character, so pivotal to the plot thus far, is not again mentioned. It is entirely possible, as is the case for Berkovits and Tamez for example, to consider the resonance of the Book of Job in the light of episodes of the suffering in the modern world without mentioning Satan once.

For the Argentinean liberation theologian Enrique Dussel however, this figure is of key importance. The interpretation that will be focused upon is his chapter entitled “The People of El Salvador: The Communal Sufferings of Job (A theological reflection based on documentary evidence)” in the 1983 book *Job and the Silence of God*.³⁸

Dussel begins his chapter, like Tamez and Gutiérrez, by utilizing Job’s rejection of his friends’ arguments to reject those theologies that argue that suffering is the result of iniquity. He states that “The comforters (Eliphaz, Bildad, Sophar and finally Elihu)...[are] the *theologians of domination* who try to convince the suffering Job that he is guilty, that he is suffering because he has sinned...Neither Job nor the people of El Salvador admit their arguments.”³⁹ Yet of the various characters in this biblical story, Dussel is most focused upon the figure of Satan. The sufferings of the people of El Salvador, which he outlines in detail, are repeatedly compared to Satan’s ‘smiting’ of Job:

³⁸ Enrique Dussel, “The People of El Salvador: The Communal Sufferings of Job (A theological reflection based on documentary evidence)” in *Job and the Silence of God*, ed. Christian Duquoc and Casiano Floristán (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1983).

³⁹ Dussel, “The People,” 62. Emphasis original.

Satan 'smote Job' (2:7), that is, El Salvador, in recent times, first in 1972, when the army – already supported by North American business – murdered more than 30,000 peasants.⁴⁰

But when Satan 'smote Job – El Salvador' for the second time in recent years, the violence was far more gruesome.⁴¹

As the people grew in consciousness and organization, so the repression grew, leading to the time of the second 'coming' of Satan.⁴²

This terror...seeks to 'immobilize' the people – Job. But the people do not accept any supposed blame. They know who the guilty ones are: Satan.⁴³

[I]n El Salvador...[the theology of liberation] de-legitimizes oppression and the sufferings of Job and deprives *Satan's collaborators* of their 'good conscience.'⁴⁴

At the end of his short chapter he notes that the only difference between Job and the people of El Salvador is that the biblical Job never learnt the role Satan plays in his sufferings. Quoting the words of a nun involved in liberation theology in El Salvador, Dussel declares that the oppressed at least know their enemy:

'The children now know what the United States are and what they mean for us. They know they are an imperialist

⁴⁰ Dussel, "The People," 62.

⁴¹ Dussel, "The People," 62.

⁴² Dussel, "The People," 63.

⁴³ Dussel, "The People," 65.

⁴⁴ Dussel, "The People," 65. Emphasis original.

power and we are part of their strategic plan. They know what an oligarchy is, who the military Junta are ...' This is more than Job could see!⁴⁵

Clearly Dussel is politically radical in comparison to many Jewish Holocaust theologians (Jewish-Americans supportive of the security of the state of Israel tend not to accuse the US of imperialistic intent).

That Dussel is more concerned with outlining injustice in El Salvador than presenting a detailed reading of the Book of Job is relatively clear from the structure of his chapter, with its lengthy quotations from the victims of oppression and narrow emphasis upon the figure of Satan. Yet the complete absence of both Job's rebellion against what he perceives to be God's injustice also represents a clear theological choice. Indeed, with his focus upon Satan, he is at one point at pains to absolve God of any blame:

The sinners are the military, the ruling classes, the United States; they are the active subject of sin...The suffering people, Job, is convinced of the essence of revelation: 'God never does wrong (*yarshyah*), do not doubt that!' (Job 34:12). 'Wrong' is the product of domination, and the dominated who suffer its effect know they are innocent; they know that the dominators make them suffer...and that the dominator is Satan.⁴⁶

What is interesting about this quotation is that Dussel, in aiming to focus upon the guilt of Satan (in all his modern guises) and the innocence of God, cites not the words of the suffering Job, but words in the biblical text from the mouth of Elihu – one of the "theologians of domination" only three

⁴⁵ Dussel, "The People," 66.

⁴⁶ Dussel, "The People," 65.

pages earlier in Dussel's chapter! The suffering Job's laments against God, for Dussel, are less suitable than a figure convinced of Job's iniquity and the overriding innocence of God.

Fleeting, at the beginning of his chapter, Dussel comments that God plays at least some part in Job's torments as he notes that "the God of Israel, the God of the poor, *absents himself*...in order to allow Satan... to dominate the situation, the system, the overall drift of events."⁴⁷ From this one might conclude (like Berkovits) that Job's rebellion against divine injustice – entirely overlooked by Dussel – may be justified given that God *allows* Satan to cause Job's sufferings. However, after this comment the focus in his chapter is upon the figure of Satan, and any blame that could be attached to God for His role in Job's sufferings is ignored. The subversive dimensions of the Book of Job have been overlooked or suppressed by this liberation theologian. Dussel's Job suffers innocently but never rebels against God because God is innocent, and it is Satan – a peripheral figure in much of the biblical text – that assumes the full role of oppressor.

A notable reversal of Dussel's reading is presented by the Jewish writer and Holocaust-survivor Elie Wiesel. He stands, it is widely acknowledged, at a point of enormous influence within Holocaust memory in North America. Alan Berger has written that "Wiesel's writings have become an indispensable starting point for anyone wishing to think seriously about the *Shoah's* theological and moral implications."⁴⁸ While he has resisted any temptation to consider the Holocaust theologically in any systematic terms, his various writings are

rich in theological content.⁴⁹ Since his first book, *Night*, written as a memoir of his experience of the Holocaust, he has repeatedly empathized with the figure of Job, and specifically with his rebellion against God. Note, for example, his words describing his theological anxiety inside the camps: "I had ceased to pray. I concurred with Job! I was not denying His existence, but I doubted His absolute justice."⁵⁰ Because of this outlook, many have continued referring to Wiesel as a kind of post-Holocaust Job. Dan Cohn-Sherbok presents one of many examples of this, reflecting that "Wiesel adopts a Job-like stance. With bitterness he criticizes God for allowing the Nazis to destroy the Jewish people. Throughout his novels he expresses outrage that He could have allowed the Jews to endure torture and murder at the hands of the Nazis."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Note the comments of Berger: "Wiesel's prolific writings assume many forms: cantatas, dialogues, essays, memoirs, plays, and novels... Wiesel's thought eludes the systematic tendency of traditional philosophical and theological speculation. His is, instead, a literary or narrative theology that is at its most penetrating when raising rather than answering questions. Wiesel as storyteller can ask, and keep on asking, about those issues which lie at the core of post-Auschwitz Jewish experience. Referring to the Holocaust, for example, he observes: 'I'm afraid of anyone who comes with a theory, a system, based on that experience. I am suspicious; I don't want theories. I believe the experience was above and beyond theories and systems and philosophies.'" "Elie Wiesel," 372-373. Whether one can describe Wiesel as a Holocaust 'theologian' is perhaps best left open. Certainly his works are often theologically provocative, even if he does not utilize the systematic discourse of most Jewish Holocaust theologians. In this study he will be considered as closely associated with Jewish Holocaust theology given that (a) he has been profoundly influential in this field, and (b) that he shares with these theologians the characteristic views that, firstly, the Holocaust represents on some level a *problem* for conceptions of God's covenant with the Jewish people, and secondly, a commitment to maintaining Israel's power and security (as is discussed below).

⁵⁰ Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (London: Penguin, [1958] 2006), 45.

⁵¹ Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *God and the Holocaust* (Herefordshire: Gracewing, 1996), 102. See also, Robert Dedmon, "Job as Holocaust Survivor," *Saint*

⁴⁷ Dussel, "The People," 62. Emphasis original.

⁴⁸ Alan L. Berger, "Elie Wiesel," in *Interpreters of Judaism in the late Twentieth Century*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Washington D.C.: B'nai B'rith Books, 1993), 383.

In a chapter focused upon the figure of Job in his 1976 non-fiction work *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends*, the strength of his empathy with Job's rebellion leads him to surprising interpretations. While, in the biblical text, Job remains broadly rebellious during the poetic dialogues, in 42:1-6, following God's speeches, he delivers a response commonly understood to be a submissive abandonment of his defiance:⁵²

Then Job answered the LORD:
 "I know that you can do all
 things,
 and that no purpose of yours
 can be thwarted.
 'Who is this that hides counsel
 without knowledge?'
 Therefore I have uttered what I
 did not understand,
 things too wonderful for me,
 which I did not know.
 'Hear, and I will speak;
 I will question you, and you
 declare to me.'
 I had heard of you by the hearing
 of the ear,
 but now my eye sees you;

Luke's *Journal of Theology*, 26, 3 (1983), 167, and Jakob Jocz, "Israel After Auschwitz," in *The Witness of the Jews to God*, ed. David W. Torrance (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1982), 61.

⁵² Robert Gordis, for example, describes 42:1-6 as "words of submission." *The Book*, 120. David Penchansky notes however that some biblical scholars have suggested that Job's words are not entirely submissive. *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 53-54. However, given that Wiesel follows Gordis' view that 42:1-6 has an at least outwardly submissive appearance there is no need to dwell upon this point.

therefore I despise myself,
 and repent in dust and ashes."

Such is the resonance of Job's rebellion for Wiesel that these words are for him a source of considerable disappointment:

Much as I admired Job's passionate rebellion, I am deeply troubled by his hasty abdication...I was preoccupied with Job, especially in the early years after the war. In those days he could be seen on every road of Europe. Wounded, robbed, mutilated. Certainly not happy. Nor resigned.

I was offended by his surrender in the text. Job's resignation as man was an insult to man. He should not have given in so easily. He should have continued to protest.⁵³

Despite this disappointment, Wiesel finds a way of rescuing the archetypal figure of theological defiance against God he so admires by declaring that Job's words are so submissive that they can only be seen as deceptive:

⁵³ Elie Wiesel, *Messengers of God: Biblical Portraits and Legends* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 234. This disappointment regarding Job's apparent submission mirrors sentiments reflected through the character of the Holocaust survivor Michael in Wiesel's earlier 1975 novel *The Town Beyond the Wall*: "Michael never ceased resenting Job. That biblical rebel should never have given in. At the last moment he should have reared up, shaken a fist, and with a resounding blow defied that transcendent, inhuman Justice in which suffering has no weight in the balance." *The Town Beyond the Wall*, trans. S. Becker (London: Robson Books, 1975), 52. The theologian Andre Neher reflects of Michael's position that "He was still always on Job's side, but was exasperated to see that with Job one could go no further." *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, trans. David Maisel (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981), 220.

Had he remained firm, had he discussed the divine arguments point by point, one would conclude that he had to concede defeat in the face of his interlocutor's rhetorical superiority. But he said yes to God, immediately. He did not hesitate or procrastinate, nor did he point out the slightest contradiction. Therefore we know that in spite of perhaps because of appearances, Job continued to interrogate God. By repenting sins he did not commit, by justifying a sorrow he did not deserve, he communicates to us that he did not believe his own confessions; they were nothing but decoys.⁵⁴

Just as Dussel underplays Job's rebellion to the point of complete absence, Wiesel emphasizes it to the extent that, where in the text he appears to repent, his repentance is merely a deception to enable his defiance to continue.

It is unsurprising therefore that the figure of Satan occupies a quite different position in Wiesel's reading. While for Dussel, Satan is the focal point at the expense of God, the reverse is the case for Wiesel. In *Messengers of God*, Satan, Wiesel suggests, was "Deceived by God."⁵⁵ This is a point he develops more fully in a later discussion of Job published in 1998:

God praises Job only to force Satan to oppose him. That is the impression one gets from the text: God's compliments are meant to arouse Satan's criticism. And Satan understood it – otherwise he would not have dared to go on contradicting God! Which means: *the whole operation was God's doing, not Satan's*. In fact – who set the story in motion? Satan? No. It was God. It was God

who opened the dialogue; Satan only answered. Satan was only an instrument.⁵⁶

David Penchansky argues in his 1990 work *The Betrayal of God: Ideological Conflict in Job* that one of the most disturbing elements of the biblical book's early prose chapters is that God is so easily tricked by Satan. He reflects that "The Satan was more clever than God, able to manipulate the deity for his own purposes."⁵⁷ Wiesel's reading is the converse: it is not Satan that manipulates God, but God that manipulates Satan. This is no less disturbing however. For Wiesel, Satan is even more insignificant than in the biblical text in which he disappears after the second chapter. The only meaningful object of Job's defiance for this post-Holocaust thinker is God.

The Book of Job, it was noted at the beginning of this article, is characterized by fissures. One of these surrounds the figure of Satan. While the significance of his role in the story itself is somewhat ambiguous, this ambiguity is fertile territory for both pious and rebellious readings. In the post-Holocaust theological outlook of Wiesel, Satan is the barely significant tool of a God who causes Job's suffering and should be the object of both his, and our, rebellion; a rebellion which Job maintains despite all appearances to the contrary in 42:1-6. For Dussel, Satan is Job's central adversary, representative of all those involved in oppression in El Salvador and a figure whom, once emphasized, allows God's innocence to be piously upheld.

Yet for all the theological conservatism inherent in Dussel's liberation reading of Job it should not be overlooked that it is

⁵⁴ Wiesel, *Messengers*, 234-235.

⁵⁵ Wiesel, *Messengers*, 227.

⁵⁶ Elie Wiesel, "Job," in *Peace, in Deed: Essays in Honor of Harry James Cargas*, ed. Zev Garber and Richard Libowitz (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 121-122. Emphasis original.

⁵⁷ Penchansky, *The Betrayal of God*, 37.

infused with a political radicalism committed to opposing those he perceives to have misused their power. Julio de Santa Ana, it may be recalled, makes a similar accusation against Holocaust theologians committed to maintaining the state of Israel's power and security. Alongside Rubenstein and Berkovits, this is an accusation that Wiesel, in a 1990 interview with Carol Rittner, has noted is also made against him:

[Rittner]

There are Jews and Christians who have criticized you because in their opinion you have not spoken out strongly enough against the abuses suffered by Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank...isn't it true that your criticism of Israel tends to be a little reserved?

[Wiesel]

It's true that I am reserved in my judgment when I speak about Israel, but let us wait a while. After all, the Jewish people is 3,500 years old; the Jewish state is only forty years old. Forty years in the life of a people 3,500 years old is not very long. Remember, for 2,000 years we were in exile. We never had power, we never abused other people's rights. Now we have power, and it is not so easy ...We should have faith in the Jewish people. We will work it out.⁵⁸

Wiesel and Dussel match the model proposed at the opening of this article well: Wiesel, a Jewish-American articulating what he believes to be the religious implications of the Holocaust, presents a theologically radical reading of Job while his political views are considered conservative for their commitment to maintaining the security and power of the state of Israel after two millennia

⁵⁸ Carol Rittner, "An Interview with Elie Wiesel," in *Elie Wiesel: Between Memory and Hope*, ed. Carol Rittner (New York and London: New York University Press, 1990), 36-38.

of Jewish powerlessness.⁵⁹ Conversely, Dussel vehemently opposes the 'Satan-like' abuses brought upon the oppressed by those with power but presents an interpretation of Job in which any of the book's theological radicalism is suppressed. If we might intuitively expect political radicalism and theologically radical reading strategies to exist in union, with Dussel and Wiesel (as with Tamez, Gutiérrez, Berkovits), this turns out not to be the case. Consideration of two final theologians considering one of the Book of Job's most famous, and also most pious, verses will however complicate matters a little further yet.

3. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away': Job 1:21 for Gerald West and Michael Goldberg

For all of the theological radicalism that can be drawn from Job's lament against what he perceives to be God's injustice, it should not be forgotten that this is a biblical text that possesses the resources for, at times, remarkably conservative theological piety. This is most notably located in Job's response to the sufferings inflicted upon him in the first two prose chapters of the book in which it is twice stated that Job does not reproach God (1:22 and 2:10). Significantly for its reception, it is this depiction of Job that has been dominant in popular consciousness of the story. Robert Gordis notes that the "centuries that have elapsed since its composition have been ages of faith. During this long expanse of time it was, by and large, the long suffering Job of the prologue, and not the passionate and pain-wracked Job of the dialogue, who occupied men's

⁵⁹ Wiesel's national identity is arguably somewhat ambiguous as he was born in Hungary and writes largely in French. In defense of labeling him Jewish-American it can nonetheless be noted that he is a US citizen and has had an enormous influence upon Holocaust memory in America. He was, for example, the first chairman of the Holocaust Commission founded by President Carter in 1978 which lead ultimately to the creation of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

thoughts.”⁶⁰ Within Christian reception of the book this is likely to have been notably influenced by the reference to “the endurance of Job” in the Epistle of Jas 5:11. Nahum Glatzer has noted that Rabbinic and medieval Jewish interpretations of Job are also characterized by a frequent downplaying of his rebellion.⁶¹

Perhaps most famous among the pious sentiments of the early prose chapters is Job’s accepting response to his sufferings in 1:21 in which he declares “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” In a 2004 work entitled “Reading Job ‘Positively’ in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa,” the liberation thinker Gerald West, writing with Bongzi Zengele, notes that the piety of Job’s early response to suffering is notably different to that which follows in the poetic dialogues as early as chapter 3.⁶²

Job, it would appear, accepts ‘the bad’ from God, remaining silent, refusing to ‘sin with his lips’ (2:10) by questioning God or this theology. As he sits silently his friends come among him, to ‘console and comfort him’ (2:11)...But before they can say anything...Job speaks. At last he takes his wife’s advice [to “Curse God” – 2:9]! Perhaps the death and destruction around him and within him had numbed him; one hopes so. Now, however, the radical challenge of his wife has registered in his numbed mind...Having earlier refused to ‘sin with his lips’ he now

lets rip!...This shift is more than a shift from prose to poetry...it is also a shift in theology!⁶³

West writes in the context of biblical interpretation within a specifically established study group among “ordinary poor, working-class and marginalized readers of the Bible” who have tested positive for HIV in South Africa.⁶⁴ For such readers, their encounter with the piety of Jb 1:21, in a context in which HIV/AIDS is frequently viewed as “a punishment from God,” has, he repeatedly asserts, been significantly unhelpful.⁶⁵

Would that we read this text at the countless funerals of our people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. Would that Job 3:3-26 were read rather than Job 1:21.⁶⁶

Attending so many funerals, members...do encounter the book of Job, but usually only the oft-quoted verses of Job 1:21, ‘the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ Again, for those infected here is further confirmation that AIDS is a punishment from God. Unfortunately, Job 3 is not read at funerals. But what if it were?⁶⁷

I asked the group if they knew of the book of Job, and many said they did. I then asked them if they had heard Job read in church and funerals, and most said that they knew Job 1:21.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Gordis, *The Book*, 219.

⁶¹ Nahum Glatzer, *The Dimensions of Job* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 16-22.

⁶² Gerald West with Bongzi Zengele. “Reading Job ‘Positively’ in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa,” in *Job’s God*, ed. Ellen van Wolde (London: SCM, 2004).

⁶³ West, “Reading Job,” 116-117.

⁶⁴ West, “Reading Job,” 113. The important role played by local Bible study groups in Latin America also is noted by Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 57.

⁶⁵ West, “Reading Job,” 115.

⁶⁶ West, “Reading Job,” 117.

⁶⁷ West, “Reading Job,” 117-118.

⁶⁸ West, “Reading Job,” 118.

West suggests that in the context of this reading group in South Africa, focus upon Job's more rebellious words proved more positive than v 1:21, since they "affirmed the enormous anger they [the members of the group] had and that it was theologically permissible to express this anger."⁶⁹ This is not to suggest that West's group followed a route towards a final rejection of God. Noting particularly God's words in 42:7 that Job had 'spoken correctly' of Him, West observes that members "were amazed to discover from Job that even though they cursed God, God still welcomed them."⁷⁰

Yet despite this reconciliatory resolution, West's treatment of the pious and rebellious strands in the Book of Job is fundamentally different to the liberation readings of Tamez, Gutiérrez and Dussel. All four may be committed to reading Job in the context of those suffering in the developing world, but where the three Latin American liberation theologians ultimately in some manner or another downplayed Job's rebellion, West downplays Job's piety – or at least its usefulness. In this regard, his reading is more similar to those of Berkovits and Wiesel, in which it is the theologically radical defiance of Job's words against God that prove more resonant in the face of innocent suffering in the modern world than the more pious elements that can be drawn from the text.

A Jewish-American respondent to the Holocaust who views the significance of Jb 1:21 quite differently to West however is the rabbi and theologian Michael Goldberg in his 1995 book *Why Should Jews Survive? Looking Past the Holocaust Toward a Jewish Future*:

[W]hen Job utters those famous words, in light of – and not in spite of – everything that has happened to him, he is acknowledging God as the Lord of everything...in acknowledging God as the ultimate source of even the most horrendous suffering, Job and Jews maintain their integrity by wholeheartedly persisting in speaking the truth. Strikingly, Job only speaks falsely when he presumes (like his 'friends') to explain why he suffers⁷¹

Goldberg's post-Holocaust reading of Jb 1:21 is radically different to West's. The element Goldberg rejects is Job's disputation in the poetic dialogues – a disputation West admires. It may initially seem, therefore, that with Goldberg and West we have a situation in which the previous patterns have been reversed. Tamez, Gutiérrez, Dussel, Berkovits and Wiesel follow a model in which liberation theologians emphasize the pious and conservative theological messages that can be extracted from Book of Job while the Jewish respondents to the Holocaust empathize with its more radical themes – notably rebellion against God.

Yet before too much weight is placed on this initial conclusion, it should be recognized that Goldberg's broader response to the Holocaust is fundamentally different to those of Berkovits and Wiesel, particularly with regard to how much emphasis should be placed upon this event as one that challenges covenantal Judaism. Alongside a commitment to the security of the state of Israel, another characteristic that applies to Jewish Holocaust theologies, for all their internal variations, is the principle that the Holocaust represents a serious problem for Judaism (though not necessarily an insurmountable one). This is not surprising – why anxiously respond theologically to

⁶⁹ West, "Reading Job," 119.

⁷⁰ West, "Reading Job," 120.

⁷¹ Michael Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive? Looking Past the Holocaust toward a Jewish Future* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1995), 78-79.

something that presents no theological challenge? However, while all Jewish Holocaust theologians follow this principle in some way or another it does not follow that *all* Jewish-American theologians do likewise. Goldberg, as the following quotation attests, is an example of a figure that decisively rejects the notion of the Holocaust's overriding importance:

While through the ages, individual Jewish persons have been brutally persecuted, even murdered, God's promise to sustain the Jewish People has not died. That promise and that People have managed to survive the worst the world could throw at them – including the Holocaust.⁷²

Covenantal Judaism, for Goldberg, is unchallenged by the Holocaust. *Why Should Jews Survive?* is a work that seeks to undermine the notion that this event need be viewed as decisively questioning traditional understandings of Judaism and be of central importance for Jewish-American life.⁷³ Wiesel, as a figure who is central to both Holocaust memory in North America and the view that it creates significant tensions in covenantal Judaism, is a notable focal point for Goldberg's unease:

In ancient times, the cultic shrine was superintended by priests. Local shrines had local priests while national shrines, for example, the Temple in Jerusalem, had high priests. Without doubt, the Holocaust cult's High Priest is Elie Wiesel. His blessing is sought for every museum and

⁷² Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, 164.

⁷³ Goldberg's view is not wholly unique. Note, for example, Jacob Neusner's view that Jewish identity "based on the Holocaust cannot create a constructive, affirmative, and rational way of being Jewish for more than ten minutes at a time. Jews find in the Holocaust no new definition of Jewish identity because we need none. Nothing has changed. The tradition endures." "The Implications of the Holocaust," *Journal of Religion*, 53, 3, (1973): 308.

memorial, from the local *bamot* to the central *hechal* in Washington.⁷⁴

For Goldberg, Wiesel is the high priest of a near idolatrous emphasis upon Holocaust memory. It is thus unsurprising that his reading of Job, so focused upon the piety of 1:21, is fundamentally different to Wiesel's. While Wiesel sees Job as an archetypal example of the kind of theological rebellion the Holocaust now demands (even when Job appears to repent), Goldberg views this biblical figure as a role-model of faith in the aftermath of suffering for post-Holocaust Jews.

Goldberg is also critical of Wiesel's political view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

We Jews have certainly shown over the last several years just how much we have learned from our historical abusers...Elie Wiesel has made a virtual career of reminding people how silence made the Holocaust possible. But during the *intifada*, when Israel was routinely using its army with disproportionate, often lethal, force against Palestinian civilians while regularly rounding up scores of Palestinians for detention camps, where was Wiesel's voice to be heard?⁷⁵

It is notable that his assertion that the state of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is comparable to Nazi treatment of the Jews (a view, it is worth noting, that does not bear exacting historical scrutiny) is reminiscent of the liberation theologian Julio de Santa Ana's view cited above. Goldberg's reading of the Book of Job, with its focus upon the theologically conservative views of 1:21 is similar to the interpretations of Tamez, Gutiérrez and Dussel. All four, in

⁷⁴ Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, 59.

⁷⁵ Goldberg, *Why Should Jews Survive?*, 128.

the final analysis, downplay Job's rebellion and draw from this biblical text a message of reconciliation with God. Goldberg's interpretation is articulated within a political analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that, like liberation theology, is critical of those in possession of power.

4. Conclusions

Where then does this leave the framework proposed in the introduction to this study: namely, that liberation theologians committed to more radical political agendas of opposing those with power, extract from the Book of Job theologically conservative messages, while Jewish-American theologians committed to conserving the security and power of the state of Israel, find in Job more theologically radical meanings? The two earlier sections of this article largely follow this framework. Where Tamez, Gutiérrez and Dussel downplay the radical implications of Job's defiance against divine injustice within political outlooks that are committed to the powerless, Berkovits and Wiesel cite his rebellion as resonant for a post-Holocaust age while firmly adhering to the view that the power and security of the state of Israel must be upheld.

The pattern however becomes more complicated with West and Goldberg. Like Berkovits and Wiesel, West's liberation reading declares the lamenting Job of the poetic dialogues to be of greater meaning in the face of modern suffering than the pious Job of the opening prose chapters. Goldberg's reading radically disagrees, declaring Job 1:21 to be the accepting outlook that post-Holocaust Jews should, in spite of the views of Berkovits and especially Wiesel, see as paradigmatic of the correct response to the extermination of Europe's Jews. However, the extent to which Goldberg disrupts the framework proposed should only be viewed as proportionate to the extent to which he is *actually* engaged in

activity often labeled 'Holocaust theology.' Politically Goldberg is as radical a critic of the powerful in Israel as Dussel is a critic of the powerful in El Salvador. This political outlook combined with his desire to downplay the importance of the Holocaust in Jewish-American life means that we must view him as not a 'Holocaust theologian,' but rather the backlash *against* such approaches.

However, if Goldberg cannot be seen as a Jewish Holocaust theologian, it should not be surmised that West has a similar relationship with liberation theology. West, it can be concluded, more meaningfully than Goldberg, represents a challenge to the notion that liberation theologians find in Job piety, while Holocaust theologians find theological radicalism. A degree of tension thus remains overall regarding this thesis – with West we can see that attempting to map this model of relationships between radicalism and conservatism in theological and political spheres onto analysis of Job's receptions in these modern contexts must be done tentatively, and remains always partial and provisional. However, in overview, the situation still remains that, with due attention to the differing anomalies presented by Goldberg and (rather more seriously) West, that among the figures discussed in this article, the framework proposed *holds* to a, though not uniform, still significant degree.

Why then, it should be asked, do figures such as Wiesel and Berkovits respond to the Holocaust by interpreting the Book of Job in more theologically radical terms than all of the liberation theologians focused upon except West? Myriad explanations could be made. Two initial proposals will be suggested here.

Firstly, it might be suggested that the Holocaust represents a more severe challenge to theologically conservative

notions of faithful trust in divine providence than the suffering of the oppressed in Latin America. This answer, with its implicit belittling of innocent suffering in the developing world, is one many would oppose. However, the idea that the Holocaust represents a more intensely severe *shock* to Jewish theology than developing world suffering over many decades does to Christian theology is perhaps less objectionable.

Secondly, it can be proposed that Jewish-American Holocaust theology reads Job more radically because of its location within a Western world in which religious doctrine has more broadly come under attack since the Enlightenment. Norman Solomon notably views Holocaust theology in such terms, reflecting that “the *Shoah* came at a time when theology was *already* in a greater ferment than ever before in history, a ferment occasioned by the intellectual movements of the modern world.”⁷⁶ Gutiérrez, in the following quotation, also seems notably aware of a division between the developed and developing worlds in terms of the extent to which religion has come under sustained intellectual challenge:

The main issue between progressive Western theology and its interlocutors, has been whether God exists or not, while the central problem in Third World countries is not atheism but an idolatrous submission to systems of oppression.⁷⁷

In emphasizing Job’s defiance in manner contrasting to Tamez, Gutiérrez and Dussel’s non-Western interpretations, Wiesel and Berkovits may be responding not only to the Holocaust, but also the challenges to religious tradition

⁷⁶ Norman Solomon, *Judaism and World Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1991), 199. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁷ Cited in West, “The Bible and the poor,” 149.

posed by the post-Enlightenment West. This is a proposal that both would certainly reject. Berkovits, in *Faith after the Holocaust*, is consistently scathing of a Western world he views as partly responsible for the Holocaust.⁷⁸ Wiesel, as a fervently religious Jew before the Holocaust, can also surely claim his doubts about providence to be a genuine response to his experience of the camps.⁷⁹ Yet it should not be totally discounted that the *reception* of their theologies has been influenced by a cultural milieu in which questioning religious tradition is less abrasive than was once the case.

Despite only being a somewhat provisional beginning, both proposals, despite their various problems, form part of the combination that has led Berkovits and Wiesel to empathize with the Book of Job’s more theologically radical elements to an extent greater than for Tamez, Gutiérrez and Dussel.

Situated on an intersection between theology, biblical studies and politics – subjects often perhaps more interwoven in the living world than an academy criss-crossed with disciplinary boundaries – this article shows that when facing episodes of innocent suffering in modernity, we need not expect theologians committed to political radicalism to search biblical texts for that which is theologically radical, or conversely, that those committed to preserving political power where it presently resides will engage with the Bible conservatively. This is a conclusion of importance for

⁷⁸ Berkovits writes that “The guilt of Germany is the guilt of the West. The fall of Germany is the fall of the West. Not only six million Jews perished in the holocaust. In it, Western civilization lost its every claim to dignity and respect.” *Faith*, 18.

⁷⁹ One of the most famous sections of *Night* reads “Never shall I forget that night, the first in camp, that turned my life into one long night...Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever,” 34. Clearly Wiesel’s theological anxieties here relate to his Holocaust experiences rather than the broader religious skepticism that has often characterized the West during modernity.

consideration of how the Bible relates to its both Jewish and Christian contexts of reception, far beyond the realms of Biblical scholarship, in the living world of readers and listeners politically engaged with attempting to face what they consider to be the ills of the modern world.

The Book of Job is a text that serves many purposes. Like its microcosm in 13:15, noted at the beginning of this article, it supports both rebellious despairing or pious trusting in God's interactions with a human history often characterized by the suffering of the innocent. The title of this paper has

attempted to mimic the ambiguity of both Jb 13:15 and the book as a whole. Whether the whirlwind from which God speaks to Job – one of biblical literature's more destructive images of the divine – is the *provider* of emancipation, or is instead something only a distrustful distance *away* from which emancipation can be sought, oscillates without resolution. In the face of one of the oldest and most insoluble theological problems – the problem of innocent suffering – it is surely fissured texts such as the Book of Job that are the most meaningful.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ My thanks go to Dr Jonathan Campbell and Dr Jo Carruthers for their helpful advice during the composition of this article.