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# Through That Glass Darkly\*

BY GEORGE STEINER

Almost wholly unexplored, in some Freudian sense perhaps suppressed, is the historical moment which has determined the tragic destiny of the Jew over these past two thousand years. It is the moment in which the core of Judaism rejects the messianic claims and promises put forward by Jesus of Nazareth and his immediate adherents.

We have modern histories of the early and intricate relations between first-century Judaism and the nascent Christian communities, between the complexly divided Jewish traditions and usages in the eastern Mediterranean world on the one hand—with their rich variety of Pharisaic, Zealot and Hellenizing branches—and the new churches, Judaeo-Christian, Pauline, pre-Gnostic on the other. But the key motion of spirit, that whereby Jews refused the ‘good news’ brought by Jesus, affirmed by his ‘resurrection’, the crucial repudiation by Jews, at one of the most sombre hours in their history—that of the murderous suppression of national insurgence and the consequent destruction of the Temple—to acknowledge, to accept the concordat of human rebirth and divine pardon offered by the Galilean god-man and his apostles, eludes us.

We have no documents—so the scholars. Neither Josephus nor Tacitus considers the radically challenging (in the full sense of that word) act of Jewish repudiation of the Son of Man. The versions given in the Gospels, Acts and Epistles are, by very definition, polemical and prejudicial. Rabbinic voices, so far as they have come down to us, speak only

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later, when Christianity, though still splintered, is dynamically ascendant. And even then, they say very little. This hiatus is itself perplexing in the extreme. It constitutes a black hole near the actual centre of Jewish history and fate. I resort to this image precisely because black holes are thought to be charged with almost incommensurable energies, both implosive and explosive, because they are believed to draw matter into their unlit compaction but also, under other conditions, eject formidable radiation. Both, the in-gathering and the fierce scattering have their obvious counterpart in the experience of Judaism after Jesus. And their source is that hour, somewhere in the mid-decades of the century of Jesus's ministry and death, about which we seem to know so very little.

Why did the Jews or, more exactly, why did Judaism so far as it can be defined in relation to Torah and Talmud, to nationhood and to exile, say 'No' to the kerygmatic revelation? When compelling elements from within Torah and prophecy had prepared that very revelation.

Here we are on well-trodden ground. Not only the general circuit of Christ's life, ministry and Passion are foretold in the Old Testament, most notably in the Psalms of the Suffering Servant and in Deutero-Isaiah; numerous specific traits are also announced. The just man of suffering is to be mocked, scourged and hung upon the tree of death. A virgin birth—though Hebraists insist that there is at this point a forced, over-determined reading of a phrase signifying rather "a young woman"—has often been held to be adumbrated. The garments of the martyred Servant are to be divided by lot. In Amos, the most ancient of prophetic texts, we learn of sale and betrayal for a handful of silver.

Modern narratology and structuralism invert the relation between these numerous predictions and the event. They ascribe to the writers of the Gospels a deliberate appropriation of these prophecies so as to compose fictions of pre-figuration, thus validating their claims for the crucified and risen Christ. It is difficult to conceive of such a device as transparent to first-century Jews or Judaeo-Christians. To them the accomplished enactment of the precisely foretold entailed a natural logic. Why, indeed how, could the Jews deny that which their own revealed books and prophetic visions had so concretely anticipated?

The issue is a more general one. Recent historical inquiry has made palpable the climate of apocalyptic impatience and expectation

which prevailed at the relevant time. Messianic claimants were recurrent. Millenarian ascetics, perfectionists of daily practise in literal awaiting of the apocalyptic end of Jewish history, gathered in the desert and cliff-caves around the Dead Sea. In a complicated mesh of visionary hallucination and nationalist politics, Zealots of various nuances called for armageddon and programmed the coming of the heavenly host. There burnt a fever in time itself. Jesus's assertion of the imminence of God's Kingdom, his summons to mankind to cleanse its ways and its spirit in the face, at once terrible and transfiguring, of the nearing Last Judgement, accorded seamlessly with contemporary symbolism, textual interpretations, and sensibility in Judaism (most emphatically, we learn, in Galilee and in the thronged Jerusalem around the Passover). Even the seemingly blasphemous dictum that he, Jesus of Nazareth, would lay waste the Temple, has been shown to be in perfect congruence with prophetic and mystical perceptions of the antinomian, violent acts which must precede and bring on the eschatological coming of the messianic hour. There was in Jesus's career a most brilliant opportunism of the eternal.

At the heart of that career lie the teachings embedded in the parables and in the Sermon on the Mount. As had been amply demonstrated, these teachings and the specific language in which they are put, correspond very nearly point for point with cardinal tenets of the Torah and with the ethics, unsurpassed, of the Prophets, most especially Isaiah. Where there are departures from the canonic norm, in respect, for example, of the need to keep company with the publicans and the sinful, or in regard to the primacy of healing and salvational acts even over the sanctity of the Sabbath, such dissents do not go signally beyond queries and challenges to Pharisaic observance as we find them among other Jewish 'liberals' or apocalypics at the time. On the contrary, it could well be argued that an acceptance of the moral prescriptions and exemplary deeds of the man Jesus meant an acceptance of a purified, humanely resourceful and compassionate Judaism, preparing, strengthening itself at the advent of a possibly terminal crisis (the destruction of the nation, the dispersal of its people as these had been graphically prophesied in Jeremiah, in Amos, in Ezekiel and countless apocalyptic texts).

In short: at essential points, on several levels—textual, symbolic, figurative, eschatological and, first and foremost, ethical—the phenom-

enon and phenomenology of the coming and Passion of Jesus matched perfectly the expectations, the needs, the hopes of Jews in those decisive decades of the first and second century. Yet he was denied. Jews—we do not know just how many, we do not know the pertinent proportions out of the total—but Jews in manifestly significant numbers chose to remain Jews. For them, for us, the Messiah had not come and the titles bestowed upon Jesus, even if he had in some actual or ritualized way sprung from the house of David, were spurious.

Again, one asks: why? Knowing both that the evidence is so opaque as to be unrecapturable and that this question, so rarely pressed, defines our history and, indeed, present estate, it is in this perplexity, authentically dialectical, that one ventures to speculate.

There had been too many: sooth-sayers, magicians, road-side preachers, epileptic *illuminati*, heralds of one greater to come and of time's foreclosure, plotters against Herod or Rome, ascetic fundamentalists out of Galilee or the desert. Too many so like him, roaming the backlands or the wilderness with a fistful of more or less fanatical loyalists, speaking in riddles, in a grammar of imminent finality. Figures such as John the Baptist or the successive Zealot-healers and prophets crucified after they had sparked local, risibly doomed rebellions. He ran too true to type. Even the miracles his followers bruited and embroidered upon, were so distinctly a part of the known scenario (with the possible, profoundly problematic exception of the resurrection of Lazarus). Thus, paradoxically, numerous Jews may scarcely have noticed Jesus's passage among them in those turbulent, clamorous days. This, assuredly, is borne out by the terse, almost casual allusion in Tacitus. But also this hypothesis is obscure, if only because we lack even tentative insight into the status of the miraculous in contemporary popular or educated perceptions. Were the transmutations of water into wine, the casting out of devils, the healing of the blind and of the lame thought to be magical turns, a faith-healer's or sage's traditional skills or suspect bits of jugglery and of motivated rumour? Were they believed at all? We have no answers to these vital queries.

But let us allow that some considerable portion of Jesus of Nazareth's sayings and teachings *did* reach Jews outside his immediate circle. It could then be that there were, among so many orthodox and edifying injunctions, precepts, inferences grievously outrageous to cur-

rent Judaic conceptions. Is there, for a Jew, any duty greater than that of bestowing loving burial on his parents, of saying *kaddish* for them aloud and under his remembering breath? But Jesus had bidden “the dead bury their dead” and had commanded his would-be disciple to forego his father’s burial in order to follow him at once. And what of the claim, itself at moments ambiguous and resistant to paraphrase in the Gospels, to ‘sit on the right of the Father’, to be His Son in a sense more singular, more directly filial, than is that allowed all human beings who may seek to image themselves as children of the Almighty? Might there have been here the node of outrage and the imperative of rebuttal? Again, we can only reflect on suppositions, observing the evasiveness with which not only gospel dicta but early Christian heresies, Arianism above all, surround the exact tenor of Jesus’s divinity. Here, undoubtedly, the thorn of doubt or of frank denial was sharp.

If we read between the sparse lines accorded our theme in rabbinic exegesis—lines, unless I am mistaken, from the medieval period rather than antiquity—and if we attend to modern religious historians and cultural anthropologists, a further motif surfaces. It is that of Jewish revulsion (the word is not too strong) at the mere notion and image of a crucified god, of a messiah done shamefully to death. From the outset, we are told, this revulsion, unattenuated by the wholly implausible epilogue of the ascent from the empty tomb, an epilogue of which even Mark seems to have been darkly uncertain, made acquiescence in Jesus and in the claims of messianic divinity urged for him impossible. Yet, again, there are problems. Judaism knows exemption from death for Enoch, the miraculous effacement of any known burial for Moses, a translation into heaven for Elijah. The proposition that some mode of *kenosis*, of divine self-bestowal in human form was too anthropomorphic to pass muster in Jewish beliefs is contradicted by the strong vestiges of the anthropomorphic, of the divine ‘physicality’ in the Torah, notably in God’s direct, carnal encounter with Moses. In so far, moreover, as it was the chastisement passed by Rome upon rebels, including those who led nationalist-fundamentalist insurrections in Judaea, crucifixion need not have carried, of itself, any stigma of abasement.

A fourth ground for negation would be pragmatic. The coming and the going of the wonder-worker from Nazareth had changed *nothing*.

The world was as cruel and corrupt and chaotic as before. The messianic must comport an eschatological transformation. The promise of the new kingdom had not been fulfilled at the time of Jesus's death and was now being either adjourned or metaphorized by the preachings of the early churches. (Inevitably, one recalls Gershom Scholem's cunning *boutade* whereby the Messiah has either already passed among us or is about to do so, but that the changes he has brought are so slight that we do not even notice them or his passage.)

Clearly, there is force in this ascription of a Jewish refusal to watchful common sense. There is, in turn, a suspect circularity to the Christian apologetic argument that the mutation caused by Christ was intended to be, is an inward one, and that the man or woman who has espoused Christianity is indeed a being reborn and of a new world. More resistant to refutation is the undoubted fact that Judaism has, at critical junctures in its troubled affairs, welcomed and invested fanatical credence in messianic claimants, such as Sabbatai Sevi, figures whose *a priori* pretensions and whose subsequent acts, were assuredly less poignant than those of the Son of Man.

Once more we ask: why *il gran rifiuto*?

A school of recent German theologians, who have made of the relations between Christ's agony and the Shoah the fulcrum of their reflections, has offered a witty intimation, where 'wit' in no manner excludes insightful gravity. Thinkers such as Markus Barth have asked whether the entire constellation of Judaic messianic tenets is not inherently ambivalent. The Old Testament and the Talmud, rabbinic teachings and Jewish historicism are unquestionably brimful of the messianic promise and of the awaiting of the Messiah in moods both anguished and exultant. But does the Jew, in psychological and historical fact truly believe in the coming? More searchingly: does he truly thirst for it? Or is it, was it perhaps from the very first, what logicians or grammatologists might designate as a 'counter-factual optative', a category of meaning never to be realised? One of the images used by these theologians—it has its provenance in a celebrated phrase of Hegel's—is that of an ontological addiction to the morning paper. Given the choice, the Jew prefers tomorrow's news, however grim, to the arrival of the Messiah. We are a people unquenchably avid of history, of knowledge in motion. We are the

children of Eve whose primal curiosity has modulated into that of the philosophic and natural sciences. In his heart of hearts, the Jew cannot accept the messianic end-stopping of history, the closure of the unknown, the everlasting *stasis* and *ennui* of salvation. In denying the messianic status of Jesus, in subverting early Christian beliefs in the proximity of the eschatological, the Jew gave expression to the genius of restlessness central to his psyche. We were, we remain nomads across time.

Strikingly, this reading does accord with a dialectical tension undeniable in Jewish thought and feeling. One need cite only Maimonides's insistence on a purely figurative, allegoric sense of the expectation of the Messiah or Franz Rosenzweig's strenuous deconstruction of the concept of a messianic actuality. Much in philosophic-historicist Judaism has indeed argued a perennial adjournment of the Messiah. Contrary strains of credence have been no less intense. Time and again more orthodox or charismatic authority has insisted on the concrete verity of the messianic, has declared that Jewish suffering and survival would be tragic non-sense unless the Messiah were to come, although the temporalities and modes of that coming are privy to God alone. The debate, the difference in sensibilities persists. It affects deeply the degrees of Jewish recognition of the State of Israel both inside the nation, whose legitimacy is denied by those in ritual attendance on a literal arrival of the Messiah, and within the relations between Israel and the Diaspora. Or to insert this debate in the context of these remarks: in what measure, at what level of consciousness, was the Jewish refusal of Jesus, at the time and thereafter, a symptom of radical psychic commitments to historical freedom, to the creative *daimon* of existential destiny on a changing earth?

Each of these five orders of causality and the undecidable complication of interplay between them may or may not serve to account for the abstention of the Jew from the Nazarene and his new synagogue, from the revelations and promise which he brought and incarnated. We do not know. But what we do know is this: however motivated, this abstention, this tenacious dissent has marked, to their very depths, the histories of Judaism and Christianity. The identifying destiny of the Jew, but also in a more oblique sense, that of the Christian, is that of the ineradicable scars left by that hour of denial, by the veto of the Jew.



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The imperceptions, the blank ignorance Jewish self-examination and consciousness so often exhibit in respect of Christology, of Pauline doctrine, of the soteriology developed by Paul and the Church Fathers, has psychologically legitimate and transparent sources. There is also a more central awkwardness. The concept of 'theology' *per se* is largely foreign to Judaism. The revealed history which identifies the Jew, the Talmudic and Midrashic readings of that history, are teleological, not theological in any philosophic, metaphysical sense. Judaism produces eminent moralists, visionaries, exegetists, but very few theologians of mark. So-called 'post-Holocaust theology' articulates condign pathos, some arresting images and metaphors. It is not a rigorous theological revaluation in any intellectual-analytic sense and it has signally failed to set the matter of final inhumanity, of the systematic bestialization of the human species at the pivot of current philosophic inquiry—where it belongs.

Whatever the reasons, Judaic inattention to the New Testament, to Patristic literature, to Augustan and Aquinian propositions, comports a consequential void. For it is in these writings that the record of Jewish suffering among the gentiles and of the Shoah is, as 'through a glass darkly', writ large. Let me be absolutely clear on this. Positivist examinations of the roots of the Shoah and of modern anti-semitism are of self-evident weight. Political history, sociology, the history of economic and class-conflicts, the study, rudimentary as it is, of mass behaviour and collective fantasies, have contributed much. But the sum of empirical understanding falls drastically short of any fundamental insight. We will not, we cannot, of this I am persuaded, be capable of 'thinking the Shoah', albeit inadequately, if we divorce its genesis and its radical enormity from theological origins. More specifically, we will not achieve penetration into the persistent psychosis of Christianity which is that of Jew-hatred (even where there are no or hardly any Jews left) unless we come to discern in this dynamic pathology the unhealed scars left by the Jew's 'No' to the crucified Messiah. It is to these unhealing scars or stigmata that we may apply, in a dread sense, Kierkegaard's injunction that the "wounds of possibility" must be kept open.

How readily we forget that not only Jesus but the authors of the Gospels and Acts, all his first followers, were Jews. The beginnings of the macabre history of Jewish self-hatred are inextricably woven with those of Christianity. Although, so far as I know, hitherto unexamined, the thought presses on one that Christianity is at fundamental points a product and externalization of just this Jewish self-hatred. This is palpable in Mark. We can, moreover, read his detestation of his fellow-Jews, his resolve to brand them with deicide, with corruption, with outrage and betrayal in the face of God, as partly encoded. To hand over Christ the Messiah for shameful execution is grievous enough—worse is the recalcitrance of the Jew before Christ's divinity, his refusal of the identity and epiphany of the Saviour. Betrayal and judicial murder can be repaired by a belief in Christ's resurrection and a conversion to his promise. The obdurate abstinence of the Jew from such conversion amounts to deicide persistently renewed. The mere existence of Jews is a repetition of Christ's suffering. It underwrites Pascal's awesome finding that no man has a right to sleep because Jesus remains in agony till the end of the world.

Paul (whom the twelfth Benediction of the Eighteen Petition Prayers declares an apostate) is among a handful of supreme thinkers and writers almost whose every sentence is not only prodigal of tensed eventualities of meaning and interpretation, but the brimming density of whose persona may, crucially, have been opaque to itself. Much of western history can be said to spring from uncertainties in the Pauline Epistles, and it is in Romans 9-11, in Ephesians 2 and 1 Thessalonians that the victimization of the Jew, and the necessity of this victimization for the Christian churches, are made fatal. Yet such is the rhetorical depth and psychological involution of Pauline pronouncements that much in these doomsday texts allows only arguable, intuitive decipherment. Jesus's Jewishness and the eschatologically-elect, privileged status of the 'people of God' are evident to Paul. As is the absolute implication of Christianity in Jewish prophecy and in the critical situation of the House of Israel on the verge of national ruin. The man from Tarsus is obsessed by the very virulence of his own past and present Judaism—present in its miraculously informed and renewed guise, in the covenant of rebirth in Christ the Jew whom God's unfathomable love has made son and flesh. At moments,

Paul urges loving compassion for the Jewish 'remnant' and a watchful expectation of the entry of the Jews into the greater *communitas* of the *ecclesia*. There is, he averts, to be no triumphalism on the part of Christian Jews and of the uncircumcised now admitted to the Lord's table.

But at other moments, far blacker impulses and spurts of menace are unmistakable. No volume, and it is never-ending, of commentary, of hermeneutic 'gentling', however subtle, can blunt the terrible edge of relegation in Romans 10-11 or 1 Thessalonians. Now that the Son and Deliverer has come, "ungodliness is taken away from Jacob" and Israel is redeemed, but only in so far and exactly in so far as it ceases to be itself. Only if it understands that wilful self-exclusion from the new dispensation will make of it an 'un-people', a vestigial absurdity and lamentable scandal. But why should the existence, so obviously marginal and pitiful, of this obdurate remnant so trouble the Apostle? Why should it be a fierce vexation to a Christendom already on the way to its Constantine triumph?

This, I believe, is where Pauline intimations are the most acute and consequential. The Jew holds Christianity and, indeed, mankind in as much as it is the object of Christ's sacrificial, redemptive love, hostage. By refusing to accept Jesus Christ, the Jewish 'remnant' has condemned man to the treadmill of history. Had the Jews acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God, had they received his concordat of grace, that filiality, that donation, would have been proved. The New would then have been shown to be beyond cavil the fulfillment of the Old Testament. The Cross would have cancelled the fatal tree in Eden. The Jewish rebuke to Christ prevents the coming of the messianic realm. It pries and forces open the ravenous jaws of history. It holds time to ransom. In the theology of Maritain this capital charge is plainly voiced. In that of Karl Barth (who wrestled lifelong with the enigma of "the remnant according to the election of grace") it is an agonizing undecidability. It yields Barth's overwhelming, but scarcely translatable, utterance that the Jew and the Jewish people are "God-sick", "sickened by" their intimacy with a God whose supreme act of love and self-donation to their election they have chosen to refuse or leave in abeyance.

In the wake of the Shoah, Christian theologians, notably, as I have mentioned, in Germany, have—distinctly in echo to Karl Barth's

ambiguities—laboured to re-define the reciprocities between synagogue and church, between Jewish survivance and Christianity. The principal strategies of argument are familiar.

The Church has 'replaced' Judaism. It is now the Christian, fully cognizant of his Jewish origins and of his debt to the Torah and the Prophets, fully cleansed of the great Marcionite heresy whereby there is an absolute discontinuity between the Old and the New scriptures, who is now the true chosen of God, the true Israel. The promised heritage of Abraham is that of a world-wide Christianity. A second stance is that which concedes to the Jewish remnant a peculiar and privileged role in the continued development of Christianity. There is a 'spiritual heritage' which Christians can derive only from the tree of Jesse, an unbroken validation of the message and meaning of Jesus forthcoming from the election of Abraham and of Moses. Almost opportunely, the very slow conversion of Jews to Christianity (and it does, after all, occur) and the stubbornness of the as yet dissenting Jews demonstrate the fact that Christ's ministry is not yet accomplished, that there is further love on offer. More self-critical is a third valuation, that of a scandalous schism in the House of the One God. An eloquent, philo-semitic theologian such as Moltmann insists that both Judaism and Christianity are, by virtue of their division, thorns in each other's sides. Judaism poses to Christianity questions, most sharply that of the unchanging tragedy of the historical after the alleged coming of the true Messiah, which Christianity has, until now, failed to answer adequately. In ways as yet impenetrable to satisfactory understanding or therapeutic action, Judaism and Christianity demand each other's separate and even conflictual incompletions if God's choice of His people is to be made visible. Fourthly, and here the demarcations are necessarily fluid, synagogue and church can be held to be complementary. Israel remains the matrix of Jesus's life and teachings; the mission of Christianity is one of ecumenical and global propagation. The Messiah awaited by Jews is the same Messiah whose *re*-appearance is awaited by Christians. Co-existence is *pro*-existence—a formulation by Markus Barth which closely reflects similar suggestions in Rosenzweig, Baeck and Buber.

Each of these positions and their overlap has its theological entailment and behavioral consequences. Each testifies to an unresolved

crux—truly that of the ‘Cross’—explicit in historical and contemporary Christianity and, unless I am in error, sub-consciously present in the condition of Judaism. But none of these models, forceful as they are, seems to me to plumb the depths.

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Even metaphorized, and metaphors can turn murderous, Paul’s construal of mankind as in some sense hostage to the Jews’ ‘No’ to Christ, is pregnant with catastrophe.

Throughout my work, I have argued that Judaic initiation of monotheism, whether by virtue of divine revelation or by virtue of anthropomorphic invention, has exercised an intolerable psychic pressure on western consciousness. Made inaccessibly abstract yet punitively close by Mosaic and Prophetic formulation, the God of Israel sought to eradicate the sensuous pluralities, the neighbourly liberalities of pagan polytheism. What fallible man or woman can be adequate to the demands of the God of Sinai or find any mirroring of his or her profane, imperfect nature in the tautology of the Burning Bush, blank and consuming as is the desert? By definition, man is always in the wrong in the face of the Mosaic deity and of its imperatives of perfection. The answer to Job is, famously, one of literally inhuman enormity. Ordinary humankind knows that under the weight of the love of this God and of His commandments of reciprocity in love, the soul breaks. What thinking, feeling Jew has not, at some hours, shared Pompey’s horror when that Roman intruded on the Holy of Holies in the captured Temple and found it empty.

Twice more, Judaism presented to the west the graphic claims of the ideal. Jesus the Jew renewed and incised the exigence of perfect altruism, of self-denial, of sacrificial humility even unto death, set out in Mosaic monotheism and in the Law. He asked of man fraternal love, unworldliness, abstentions from pride and benefit formidably beyond the reach of any but saints and martyrs. The trinitarian construct, the suspension of the Law in the name of love abounding, the development of explicit scenarios of celestial compensation by Christianity and its churches, enact specific attempts to paganize an underlying Judaic monotheistic heritage. They constitute tactics of attenuation and dissipation aimed at

making bearable that God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob whom a Pascal still invokes with an apprehension of His original and authentic terror. The gnostic-Hellenistic hybrid with Judaism that is Christianity, the pantheon of its saints, palpable relics, indulgences, confessional absolutions and neon-lit Paradise, proved magnificently marketable. But at its militant and triumphant centre, the pressure of Mosaic and Nazarene demands, the summons to perfection, remained. Time and again, be it in desert monasticism or Savonarola, be it in Kierkegaard's 'fear and trembling' or in Karl Barth's stress on the abyss separating God from man, Christianity has been drawn towards the Judaism within itself.

The third of the principal motions of spirit whereby Judaism visits on our civilization the blackmail of utopia is that of the diverse shades of messianic socialism and Marxism. Marxism is, in essence, Judaism grown impatient. The Messiah has been too long in coming or, more precisely, in not-coming. The kingdom of justice must be established by man himself, on this earth, here and now. Love must be exchanged for love, justice for justice, preaches Karl Marx in his 1844 manuscripts, echoing, transparently, the phraseology of the Psalms and the Prophets. There is in the egalitarian programme of communism, in the economics of finality as outlined by Marxist-Leninist doctrine, little that is not called for, implacably, by Amos when he announces God's anathema on the rich and God's loathing of property. Where Marxism prevailed, even or especially in its more brutal modes, it fulfilled that vengeance of the desert on the city so strident in Amos and other prophetic-apocalyptic texts of social retribution. (It need hardly be said that the current crisis and conceivable collapse of Marxist messianic immanence will reach deep into the affairs and future of Judaism.)

Three times, therefore, the Jew has been the summoner to individual and to social perfection, the night-watchman who does not ensure repose but, on the contrary, wakes man from the sleep of common comforts and self-regard. (Freud even woke us from the innocence of dreaming.) A triple exaction which, I believe, has bred in the western psyche deep-lying detestations. It is not the God-killer whom Christianity has hounded to the rim of extinction in Europe since the Middle Ages, it is the 'God-maker' or mouthpiece who has reminded mankind of what it *could* be, of what it must become if man is indeed to be man. Thus a being

of Jesus of Nazareth's ethical radiance can legitimately be called a 'Son of Man'. Is there anyone we hate more than he or she who asks of us a sacrifice, a self-denial, a compassion, a disinterested love which we feel ourselves incapable of providing but whose validity we nevertheless acknowledge and experience in our inmost? Is there anyone we would rather annihilate from our presence than the one who insists on holding up to us the unrealistic potentialities of transcendence?

Thus there has been in every pogrom and in the Shoah a central strain of Christian self-mutilation, a desperate endeavour by Christianity and by its pagan-parodistic off-shoots such as Nazism, to silence once and for all the curse of the ideal inherent in the Mosaic covenant with God, in the more-than-human humaneness of Isaiah, in the teachings of Jesus the Jew. Eradicate the Jew and you will have eradicated from within the Christian west an unendurable remembrance of moral and social failure. There is, in consequence, an awful symmetry in the fact that by instituting and allowing the world of the death-camps, European gentile civilization has striven to make it unbearable for Jews *to remember*. For it is in Judaism that there has been the obsessive, maddening remembrance which Christianity worked furiously to stifle inside itself.

But in the perspective of Paul's lineaments of mankind held to ransom by the denying remnant of Judaism, by the simple survival of this inexplicable vestige, we can consider even further the twists of menace. We can follow the logic even of Luther's call for the murder of the Jews once they had renewed their original refusal of Christ by rejecting the Reformation and its ardent, sincere proffer of Sion regained and renewed.

Where religious imaginings and their kindred perversion touch on the pulse of the sub-conscious, the monstrous is not far off. Yet we must try to perceive clearly. Men have massacred men, there has been what is sometimes loosely called 'genocide', from the Book of Joshua to Pol Pot. If we sense in the Shoah a singularity, a quantum jump in our long chronicles of inhumanity, it is because mass-slaughter and planned elimination, both of which have manifold precedent, were accompanied by, were explicitly designed as the de-humanization of the victim. He was to be recognised as a being less than human. Torture and fear were to reduce him to a sub-human status. In the fantastications of Nazism, those starved, beaten, gassed to extinction were not men and women and children but



vermin, members of a species other than that of man. Now observe the symbolic symmetry. In the eye of the believer, God had, through the incarnation of Christ, through the descent of the divine into human form, affirmed, attested to the literal godliness of man. Man had, in Christ, been of the nature of God. This modulation had been scorned by the Jew. Was it not inevitable that the Jew, who had refused transcendence for man, should bear the final, logical consequence, which is to be made less than human? The Shoah, the death-camps have lowered the fragile threshold of humaneness. If the victims were 'un-manned', so were the butchers whose intent and acts diminished them to bestiality. The Jew on his way to the gas-chambers was more than a scapegoat. He was, in a sickness unto death of logic, of reciprocity, the provocation to, the occasion of, his persecutors' descent into animality. It is, in both his agony and in the sadistic beastliness which brought on that agony—the two being rigorously inseparable—the Jew who put in question the belief that our kind, that *homo sapiens* has, in some manner, been created in God's image. Without the Jew, there would not, there could not have been the cancellation of man that is Auschwitz—a cancellation so symmetrical with that, embodied in Judaism's remembrance of the rejection, of the claims to the divine in Jesus. Erasure for erasure. The eclipse of light over Golgotha and the black hole in history of the Shoah. Darkness calling to darkness and the Jew centrally implicated in both.

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What follows (however tentatively)?

It is my instinct that ecumenical programmes, in respect of reconciliation between Jew and Christian, may be of some social, political use. But I cannot see that they have any foundation in theological fact. "With the complete physical extinction of all Jews from the face of the earth the demonstration and proof of God's existence would collapse and the church would lose its *raison d'être*: the church would fall. The future of the church lies in the salvation of all Israel." (M. Barth) One values the penitential generosity of such sentiments. But neither Rome nor Geneva would, when being true to themselves, need to accept them. The survivance of the Jew has nothing whatever to do with any ontological proof of God's



existence such as we find in Anselm, in Aquinas or, in a different but related tenor, in Calvin and Karl Barth. We have seen that this survivance is, from the point of view of Pauline and Augustinian historicism and teleology, a scandal, at best ambiguously recalcitrant to interpretation, at worst to be eradicated so that Christ may return in salvation and in glory.

For his part, the Jew cannot negotiate his rejection of a messianic Jesus. He cannot, in however metaphoric a translation, accept the 'God-entrance' into the Galilean sayer of parables and the latter's resurrection and ascent to shared divinity. Precisely to the extent that Jews remain Jews, these denials must stand and must, by the existential fact of continued Jewish life and history, be constantly re-affirmed. So what is there 'really', taking reality to be of the essence, to be talked about? (A theocratic and prophetic 'primitive' such as Solzhenitsyn has seen this plainly and made no cant of his Christological distaste for the Jew.)

Secondly, one conjectures, but I speak as an outsider, that Christianity itself is sick at heart, that it is lamed, possibly terminally, by the paradox of revelation and of doctrine which generated not only the Shoah but the millennia of anti-Jewish violence, humiliation and quarantine which are its obvious background. It stands, or should stand, appalled by its own image, by its fundamental failings, whether by omission or commission, in the season of barbarism, increasingly conscious of the fact that the death-camps were modelled on the long habituation of Christian Europe to blueprints of Hell (a concept antithetical to Judaism); Catholicism and Protestantism hardly know themselves. We do hear sincere calls to self-examination, to a re-thinking of a profoundly flawed history. There are poignant attempts to re-emphasize and make consequential the Judaic substance in Christianity. But these cannot be pressed too far, if Christianity is not to efface or trivialize the basic tenets of its revelation. How can there be authentic truth and salvation outside Christ? How can the Jew's veto, be it that of an impotent, despised minority, of a fossilized vestige—an image perennial in Christian apologetics and polemics—be accepted, let alone be made concordant with the Christian creed and the life of the churches? Charles Péguy devises the harrowing conceit whereby the actual physical agony of the crucified Jesus only begins at the exact moment in which Jesus realises that his infinite powers of love cannot obtain pardon for Judas. I do not doubt that agony; but nor can I doubt the

impossibility of that pardon.

Seriously questioned, the current condition of Judaism is scarcely more consoling than is that of its most successful and ungrateful heresy. The notion of 'coming to terms' with the Holocaust is a vulgar and profound indecency. Man cannot, he must not ever 'come to terms', historicize pragmatically or incorporate into the comforts of reason his derogation from the human within himself. He must not blur the possibility that the death-camps and the world's indifference to them marked the failure of a crucial experiment: man's effort to become fully human. After Auschwitz Jew and gentile go lamed, as if the wrestling-bout of Jacob had been well and truly lost.

As I have noted, this laming has, on the Jewish side, generated no theological-philosophical renewal (perhaps it could not do so). Jewish orthodoxy continues in its often jejune formalism, in its feverish atrophy in ritualistic minutiae. Worse: in Israel it has fuelled state savagery and corruption—for let us never forget that each time a Jew humiliates, tortures or makes homeless another human being, there is a posthumous victory for Hitler. In liberal Judaism, in Judaism at large, the winds of spiritual development, of metaphysical exploration, blow faint. Where, now, is there 'a guide for the perplexed', or a voice out of the register which produced a Spinoza, a Bergson or a Wittgenstein? With the break-down of messianic radicalism throughout the Marxist domain, the fertile stress of critical questioning, of utopian immanence, withers away. How Jewish was the Scribe of Revelation when he spoke in bitter contempt of those who "blow neither hot nor cold".

There cannot, I suggest, be any advance inward in Judaism's sense of its purpose, in its grasp of the mystery of its survival and of the obligations this mystery entails, unless the Jews grapple with the origination *from the heart of Judaism* of Christianity. We must strive to gain insight not only into the logic, into the psychological and historical validity of this genesis of the Christian out of the Jew; we must also seek clarity in regard to the tragic, possibly mutually-destructive bonds which, since, have tied Jew to Christian, Christian to Jew or, to put it nakedly, victim to butcher. Jews are compelled to envisage, if not to allow, if not to rationalize, the hideous paradox of *their innocent guilt*, of the fact that it is they who have, in western history, been the occasion, the recurrent

opportunity, for the gentile to become less than man.

The challenge to be faced is that put to us by Sidney Hook in a posthumous interview. Hook asked whether “it had really been worth it”, whether Jewish survival from persecution to persecution, in pariahdom and across the abyss of the Holocaust, could be assessed positively. Had there not been too much pain, too much horror? Would it not have been preferable, asked Sidney Hook, if the Jewish remnant after Christ had melted into the commonwealth of Hellenistic and Roman Christendom, if it had more or less ‘normally’ lost its identity and *apartheid* as did other peoples no less gifted, such as the ancient Egyptians or the classical Greeks? To which absolutely unavoidable question, the coda could well be: does the unexamined axiom of national survival justify the necessary policies of the State of Israel at its borders and, what is far graver, inside them? To what end the unquenchable constancy of Jew-hatred, to what end Auschwitz and the everlasting brand it has put on Jewish memory, on any responsible use by a Jew of the past tense?

I have ventured to propose that Hook’s inquiry concerns not only the Jews to whom it is addressed, but the Christian who has established its sombre context. For after such remembrance, what forgiveness, what self-forgiveness?

All too plainly, the issues defy the ordering of common sense. They seem to lie just on the other side of reason. They are extraterritorial to analytic debate. They take substance from the question of God, from the question of His existence or non-existence. We can define modernism as the sum of impulses and psychological-intellectual configurations in which the enormity of that question is experienced only fitfully or in metaphors grown pale. One is very nearly tempted to hope for a moratorium on future discourse. We Jews have said ‘No’ to the claims made for and, in certain opaque moments by, the man Jesus. He remains for us a spurious messiah. The true one has not come in his stead. Today, who but a fundamentalist handful awaits his coming in any but a formulaic, allegoric sense, a sense bitterly irrelevant to the continuing desolation and cruelty of the human situation? In turn, 1 Thessalonians, 2, 15, proclaims the Jew to be a deicide, a slayer of his own Prophets and, therefore, one “contrary” or “enemy to all men.” Vatican II sought to attenuate or even cancel this sentence of death in the troubled light of modern squeamishness

and the Holocaust. In view of the 'final solution' which this Pauline verdict determines. But the text is no accident: it lay, it continues to lie, at the historical and symbolic roots of Christendom.

On both sides, might it not be salutary if words now failed us?

We must learn to persist in some dispensation of twilight with what dignity and minor virtues we can muster. If we are able to do so, we ought to apprehend our own location in a biologically brief history as that of a prologue to the coming into being of a more humane humanity. The most darkly inspired of all twentieth-century imaginers of God, Franz Kafka, reportedly said: "there is abundant hope, but there is none for us." What we may do is to attempt to hear from within this abdication from the messianic, be it Jewish or be it Christian, the promise of an eerie freedom.

(for Raul Hilberg)