

Radical Theology and the Reorganization of the US-American Religious System

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Philippe Codde,

"Radical Theology and the Reorganization of the US-American Religious System"

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Abstract: In his article "Radical Theology and the Reorganization of the US-American Religious System," Philippe Codde uses the example of the highly popular movement of death-of-God theology in the 1960s to demonstrate the wide applicability for cultural research of Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and to illustrate the validity of Even-Zohar's assertion that peripheral elements in any system can yet occasion a dramatic shift in the system's central repertoires. Although Richard Rubenstein's reality model never made it to the center of the US-American religious system, his radical theology did impel the more traditional theologians in the center of the system finally to grapple with the subject of the Holocaust. The paper is an excerpt from Philippe Codde, *The Jewish American Novel*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2007.

Philippe CODDE

Radical Theology and the Reorganization of the US-American Religious System"

In 1966, Richard Rubenstein burst upon the US-American theological scene with the publication of his *succès de scandale*, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*. This groundbreaking study, generally considered the epitome of radical theological (or death-of-God) thinking, was one of the very first Jewish theological works to incorporate the Holocaust in its reflection on the covenant between God and his Chosen People. Soon, the death of God movement enjoyed a popular success rarely witnessed in modern theology: in 1966, it even made the cover of *Time* magazine. This is obviously not to suggest that radical theology originated as a direct result of the increasing visibility of the Holocaust in the 1960s (see Feingold; Novick); Protestant theologians such as Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton -- unaffected by the Holocaust -- were also proclaiming the death of God. But when Rubenstein related radical theology to the *Shoah*, the movement's instant popularity created dramatic changes in the center of the US-American religious system, as will be demonstrated in this paper. Despite its popular success, radical theology soon lost its appeal, and, by the end of the 1960s, it had again vanished from the religious system. John Carey points out that one of the reasons for the movement's swift demise was purely institutional: "the popular concept of the death of God was simply more than the Christian religious establishment could bear. Thousands and thousands of ministers, hundreds of boards and agencies, and many related institutions were tied into the God hypothesis for their life and distinctiveness. ... Political pressure from denominations eventually pushed the principal contributors to different institutions" (85). Today, many consider the death of God movement "a theological failure" (Altizer, "Holocaust" 20), a "dreadful and ludicrous chapter" in theology (Berenbaum 46), or "a fad that momentarily captured the attention of the media" (Idinopulos 64), but it would be hard to deny that radical theology shaped the face of the 1960s in America. Roth and Haynes recall: "The death of God movement made a more than ephemeral mark when it interrupted the American Dream. Breaking into an American scene in which the optimism of Great Society hopes collided with Vietnam nightmares and nagging domestic anxiety embodied in the assassinations that took the brothers Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., radical theology raised uncomfortable questions, even when its voices waxed eloquent about the future's bright promise. Those questions had not been raised in quite the same way before, and the level of discomfort they produced was directly proportional to the Holocaust awareness that informed them" (131). Although the movement was essentially influential in academic institutional discourse, the *Time* cover story shows that even the popular media picked up on its success. In fact, the ideas propounded by the radical theologians had penetrated society to such an extent that it became a subject for graffiti ("God is dead. (signed) Nietzsche. Nietzsche is dead. (signed) God"; "God is dead. -- Thomas Altizer"; "Sorry about your God, mine is alive and well") and even bumper stickers ("God is not dead -- He is in Acapulco") (Carey 86; Lelyveld vii). The reality model introduced by radical theology never made it to the center of the religious system, however, as it never received any institutional support and had such a brief life span that it was never reproduced on a significant scale. The case of radical theology does provide an interesting example, however, of comparative cultural theorist Even-Zohar's assertion that elements from the periphery can be extremely influential, because the center of the system constantly has to incorporate elements from the periphery in order to insure its own position. If not, the center becomes petrified and threatened in its existence (Even-Zohar, "System" 89; see also Codde). The reaction of the traditional, conservative Jewish theologians to the crisis introduced into the system by the advent of radical theology illustrates the center's brilliant adaptation to the latest needs of the time. In addition, it also demonstrates the wide applicability of Even-Zohar's polysystem theory for the analysis of cultural movements that transcend the realm of translation studies for which the theory was originally designed.

But what exactly was this death of God movement and why did it become such a controversial (though short-lived) success? As said, systems in crisis will tend to reorder its internal structure, often

by the intrusion of foreign elements from adjacent systems, to replace the central, petrified home repertoires (Even-Zohar, "System" 92). This is an apt description of the process that took place in the US-American religious system when a drastic reordering of the system's internal structure resulted from the system's invasion by radical theology. William Hamilton describes the critical state of theology in the early 1960s: "Theologies change for many reasons. Old theologies break down, or just lose their effectiveness. Everybody knows, or at least feels, that the time of troubles for the neo-orthodox-ecumenical-biblical-kerygmatic theology has arrived. This theology, once the prophetic disturber of peace, has now become the establishment, and under attack has turned querulous and defensive" ("Optimism" 157). At the same time, the Jewish American community saw synagogue attendance dwindle by the 1950s and ever fewer US-American Jews observed the Sabbath or the *kashrut* (the dietary laws). For many, Jewish identity was no longer related to religion. In 1952, only 70% of US-American Jews professed a belief in God (Hertzberg 324-29). Clearly, the religious system was in a crisis, and Hamilton's comment shows that its *repertoire* (Even-Zohar "Factors") was no longer adapted to the new philosophical and political realities. As a result, the theological system opened up to influences from adjacent systems and welcomed elements from the refreshing wave of radical theology, which included in its repertoire elements borrowed from the political and the philosophical systems -- specifically the Holocaust and existentialism, as I will show.

Thomas A. Idinopulos avers that the death of God theology was nothing more than a discursive, rhetorical device (65). The movement's major representatives were the Christian theologians Thomas J. Altizer, William Hamilton, and Paul M. van Buren, and the Jewish theologian Richard Rubenstein. Given that they had completely different backgrounds, frames of reference, interests, and purposes, it is actually erroneous to consider radical theology a homogeneous movement. The movement's major characteristic was difference and dissent (see, e.g., Rubenstein, *Auschwitz* 44). Consequently, the "First National Conference on Radical Theology and the Death of God," held at the University of Michigan in 1966, also turned out to be the last of its kind (Idinopulos 64). Rubenstein captured his profound sense of estrangement from the Protestant death of God theologians when he wrote: "I feel strangely as if Dr. Altizer and I are Christian and Pharisee in the first century all over again" (qtd. in Bennett 111). He also recalls his amazement at being mentioned in Hamilton's 1963 article "The Death of God Theologies Today." He was willing to grant that there were "affinities" in their thinking, but underscored the "major differences" (Rubenstein, *Auschwitz* 60, 244). The only thing these theologians had in common was the popular catchphrase "death of God." As a purely discursive device, the catchphrase accomplished three things: (1) it allowed these theologians to draw attention to their works, which otherwise might have lacked public notice; (2) it involved them in completely divergent object creations (as the same term was made to connote radically different meanings -- Altizer and Hamilton list at least ten possible meanings of the phrase "death of God" x-xi); and (3) it allowed for a specific subject creation, for a specific view of humankind, that a profound awareness of the Holocaust might otherwise have precluded. Thus, Eugene Borowitz points out that the controversy about the death of God was really about the death of *mankind*; it was easier to inculpate God than to acknowledge man's own responsibility: "'the death of God' shielded us from the tragic loss of the one 'god' in whom we moderns had avidly trusted -- ourselves, humankind" (397). For Idinopulos, only Rubenstein's thinking was fairly authentic because his concern with the death of God was truly occasioned by the historical crisis of the Holocaust. As Rubenstein's work gave the movement an aura of authenticity -- which accounted for the movement's popular success -- Protestant theologians would later claim that their thinking had also been influenced by the Holocaust, though their work shows hardly a trace of that influence (see Rubenstein, *Auschwitz* 45; Idinopulos 66; Roth 72; Altizer, "Holocaust" 19; van Buren 37). Given that the concerns of the Protestant death of God theologians did not include historical events -- as opposed to Rubenstein's historical and sociological concerns -- Altizer's later assertions seem rather gratuitous. Unfortunately, I cannot elaborate here on the irreconcilable differences between the Protestant theologians (who first used the term "death-of-God")

and Rubenstein's thinking. Instead, the focus of this paper is the controversial impact of Rubenstein's book on the US-American religious system in the 1960s.

When the Jewish American rabbi Richard Rubenstein became associated with death of God theology, the movement soon made its mark. The initial encounter between Rubenstein and the Protestants took place in the Fall of 1965, when Rubenstein was invited to respond to Altizer's presentation at a symposium at the Glenn Memorial Methodist Church. John J. Carey recalls: "Not many people present understood the mystical and rather opaque presentation of Altizer. It was clear, however, that in his view, our traditional assumptions about God in Western theology and culture had to go. Richard Rubenstein was asked to be a respondent to Altizer, and his presentation at that time catapulted him into national prominence. He ended his remarks by saying, 'As a Jew, I can understand why people speak of the death of God. What I do not understand is why there should be dancing at the funeral.' The power of that remark stunned the overflow audience, and the crowd sat in complete silence for about a minute" (84). Rubenstein, who, because of the Holocaust, was unable to understand Altizer's and Hamilton's rejoicing in the death of God, would have a sustained impact on Jewish circles in the US, as well as on gentile audiences (Roth 69). The publication of *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* in 1966 -- mostly containing articles published in the first half of the 1960s -- earned its author "an unprecedented torrent of personal abuse, so that he has nearly been driven out of Jewish public life" (Neusner 71). For Neusner, the abuse to which Rubenstein has been subjected -- being called a Nazi and being compared to Hitler -- is "the highest possible tribute on the part of his enemies to the compelling importance of his contribution" (71). To understand Rubenstein's impact on the Jewish American community, I will contextualize his theology by looking at the works that influenced it, as well as those that responded to the Rubenstein controversy.

One of the first serious attempts in Jewish theology to come to terms with the Holocaust was Ignaz Maybaum's 1965 study *The Face of God after Auschwitz*. Maybaum, however, was British and relatively unknown in the United States. Although he lost his mother in Theresienstadt and his two sisters -- as well as other relatives -- in Auschwitz, Maybaum maintained his belief in the Covenant between God and his Chosen People. In his book, he therefore tries to counter "the now widely spread agnosticism and non-religious humanism" (13). He is specifically at odds with Sartrean existentialism: "I have heard of coffee bars which are patronised by so-called intellectuals who sit there with gloomy faces; they think themselves a finer breed than is the bourgeoisie; they are full of contempt for what they call bourgeois happiness; they subscribe to the philosophy of the Frenchman Sartre which is labeled existentialism. Sartre wrote a book with the title *Nausea* -- indicating his view of life" (109). Given that Richard Rubenstein's discourse was drenched in existentialism, one can hardly be surprised that his answer to the Holocaust differed considerably from Maybaum's. While Maybaum's work was undoubtedly an honest attempt to explain the coexistence of radical evil and a beneficent God, many of the immature theses propounded in this book show that the Holocaust was still uncharted territory in theological studies. For Maybaum, the Holocaust was the third *churban*, the third major destruction in Jewish history, after the destruction of the two temples (198). It is important to note that the word *churban* implies the beginning of a new era; it denotes historical *progress* through sacrifice (32). This is consistent with Maybaum's traditional reading of Jewish history as a *Heilsgeschichte*, which stresses on the one hand God's active interference in human history, and on the other hand, the beneficent effect of every major disaster. Thus, the first destruction of the temple transmogrified the Jews into "a people with a mission for mankind." The second *churban* "led to the progress leading from worship with animal sacrifice to the Synagogue with its worship constituted by the spoken word, by prayer" (198). Perhaps Maybaum's most remarkable argument -- laden with Cold War rhetoric -- concerns the positive impact of the third *churban*, the Holocaust, which consists of the final Westernization of the Jewish people: "The Western World itself after 1918 failed to bring the ideas of the West, democracy and freedom to Eastern Europe. Auschwitz, in awful efficiency, achieved the phenomenon that the whole Jewish people is today in the Western camp. Those of us who are not in this camp of freedom

and progress—as are our kith and kin in Communist Russia -- can only pray that the West which is far away from them should come to them and bring them redemption" (200-201). This rather absurd argument does not take into account the fact that the eulogized culture of progress in the Western World reached its deplorable apogee in Nazi Germany, and when it did reach out to the East, it was not to bring freedom or redemption to Eastern Europe but to slaughter every Jew in sight. In order to maintain his belief in the Covenant between a beneficent God and the Chosen people, Maybaum has to minimize the impact of the Holocaust as "'a small moment', 'a little wrath', measured against the eternal love which God showers on his people" (66). The significance of the Holocaust lies not in the death of one third of world Jewry but, quite contrarily, in the survival of two thirds, referred to as "the Remnant." This Remnant is proof of God's continued presence in Jewish history. Instead of trying to account for the existence of radical evil, Maybaum seems to urge the "lucky" ones to rejoice in their having escaped. What about the deceased, however? And what about God's role in this evil? To answer this question, Maybaum once more harks back to traditional, Midrashic explanations of evil: just like the Pharaoh who chased the Jews from Egypt, "Hitler was an instrument, in itself contemptible. But god used this instrument to cleanse, to purify, to punish a sinful world; the six million Jews, they died an innocent death; they died because of the sins of others" (67).

When Richard Rubenstein entered the arena, his iconoclastic work reacted primarily against such traditional accounts of evil. Rubenstein's book, however, was no direct reaction to Maybaum's theology, which he was not conversant with at the time he wrote *After Auschwitz*: "I did not hear of Maybaum until many years after the 1966 publication of the first edition of *After Auschwitz*. Had I read Maybaum before writing the first edition, I would certainly have referred to him in explaining my reasons for rejecting the traditional biblical theology of covenant and election" (*History* 168-69). In the second, thoroughly revised edition published in 1992, Rubenstein therefore added nearly a full chapter to discuss his disagreement with Maybaum's explanation of historical evil. In the original edition, he reacted, however, against very similar views expressed by Heinrich Grüber of the Evangelical Church of East and West Berlin. At their historic private meeting in 1961, Grüber expressed allegedly the view -- shared by Maybaum -- that, while the Jews had formerly been "smitten by Nebuchadnezzar and other 'rods of God's anger'" (*Auschwitz* 54), Hitler was just another one of those rods, an instrument of a providential God who acted upon history. Although the Dean did not state a crime of which the Jews could possibly have been guilty, for Rubenstein, the argument boiled down to the age-old association of Jews with the murderers of Christ. In this respect, Grüber's view was even more pernicious than Maybaum's, as Maybaum at least believed in the innocence of the Jewish sacrificial victims. Grüber's view was all the more remarkable because it was a belief fostered by a Christian who had fervently opposed Nazism -- Grüber had ended up in Dachau and was the only German to testify against Eichmann in Jerusalem (*Auschwitz* 48). Due to the interview, Rubenstein reached "a theological point of no return" (*Auschwitz* 46). The Holocaust made it impossible to accept three of the fundamental tenets of Jewish traditional theology: that a providential God acted upon history; that the people of Israel were God's chosen people; and that disasters were occasioned by Israel's sins: "How can Jews believe in an omnipotent, beneficent God after Auschwitz? Traditional Jewish theology maintains that God is the ultimate, omnipotent actor in the historical drama. It has interpreted every major catastrophe in Jewish history as God's punishment of a sinful Israel. I fail to see how this position can be maintained without regarding Hitler and the SS as instruments of God's will. The agony of European Jewry cannot be likened to the testing of Job. To see any purpose in the death camps, the traditional believer is forced to regard the most demonic, antihuman explosion in all history as a meaningful expression of God's purposes. The idea is simply too obscene for me to accept" (*Auschwitz* 153). After his encounter with Grüber, Rubenstein became convinced "that Jews were confronted by an inescapable either/or: One can either affirm the innocence of Israel of the justice of God at Auschwitz" (*History* 171). On the fictional level, Rubenstein sees this traditional view symbolized by Father Paneloux in Albert Camus's *The Plague*, the Jesuit priest who discussed the disease spreading over the

city of Oran in terms of divine retribution. Rubenstein incisively notes: "Father Paneloux is capable of maintaining his interpretation of events from the pulpit. Later he is broken by the terrible sight of the painful death of a child" (*Auschwitz* 67). The traditional theological view, in other words, is hard to maintain in the face of innocent suffering. Rubenstein concludes: "A god who tolerates the suffering of even one innocent child is either infinitely cruel or hopelessly indifferent" (*Auschwitz* 87).

For Rubenstein, the only acceptable view of history after the Holocaust is therefore the one propounded by French existentialism of an absurd universe devoid of God: "Had I lived in another time or another culture, I might have found some other vocabulary to express my meaning. I am, however, a religious existentialist after Nietzsche and after Auschwitz. When I say we live in the time of the death of God, I mean that the thread uniting God and man, heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling cosmos, unaided by any purposeful power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God?" (*Auschwitz* 152). Unlike Ivan Karamazov's famous outcry, however, God's death does not mean that all is permitted, nor that everything is meaningless, which is how existentialism has often been misinterpreted: "What the existentialists do mean is that there is no *ultimate* meaning to existence. They call upon men to create with lucidity their own private meanings and purposes in the knowledge that no power in the cosmos will ultimately sustain or validate them" (*Auschwitz* 204-5). These ideas reveal an important difference with Altizer's thinking: when Rubenstein uses the death-of-God terminology, he consistently refers to the *time* of the death of God. God's death, in other words, was not a historical or metaphysical but a cultural event: it is "more a statement about man and his culture than about God" (*Auschwitz* 151). As such, Rubenstein's view is really a radicalization of Martin Buber's theology, which already spoke of the *eclipse* of God (Buber 23). An eclipse, however, is not a permanent condition. While Rubenstein obviously does not share Buber's optimism about a future return of God—implied by the concept of eclipse -- he does not see this as a reason to pass up religion. Quite contrarily, Rubenstein argues that "it is precisely the ultimate hopelessness and gratuity of our human situation which calls forth our strongest need for religious community. If all we have is one another, then assuredly we need one another more than ever" (*Auschwitz* 119). The importance of religion for the Jews, then, lies in tightening the community, in creating a link with the traditions of past generations.

This is obviously a strange leap in Rubenstein's thinking. While one can easily understand the stress on the growing importance of community and tradition for Jews after the Holocaust, it is far less clear how one can adhere to a *religious* community after the death of God. In order to take this leap, Rubenstein has to redefine his concept of God and ends up with an almost pantheistic view of a God who is closely related to nature: "No more will God be seen as the transcendent Lord of nature, controlling it as if it were a marionette at the end of a string. God will be seen as the source and life of nature, the being of the beings which ephemerally and epiphenomenally are nature's self-expression" (*Auschwitz* 139). Clearly, Rubenstein was not really talking about the death of God either, but only about the demise of one specific *idea* of God: the biblical God of history. Rubenstein's influential *After Auschwitz* proved at once the apogee and the end point of radical theology. Thus, its model -- which consisted of a specific view on God in the light of the Holocaust -- remained peripheral in the theological system. Yet, from its peripheral position it managed to exert such a pressure on the system's center, that the theological establishment was forced finally to incorporate the Holocaust into its theological thinking, more than twenty years after the historical event. The fervent reaction of the established theologians to Rubenstein's model illustrate the defensive strategies of a conservative center to maintain its position by adaptation to elements introduced through the periphery. Specifically three theological works by American Jews, written during the 1960s, illustrate how Rubenstein's model was suppressed in the center by introducing alternative -- more traditional -- models to approach the Holocaust from a theological point of view.

In 1967, immediately following Rubenstein's *succès de scandale*, two book-length replies to radical theology were written by Jewish theologians who, as opposed to Rubenstein, did not relinquish their

faith in the Covenantal God. The first reply, published in 1968, was Arthur J. Lelyveld's *Atheism is Dead: A Jewish Response to Radical Theology*, the title of which clearly parodies God-is-dead theology. Lelyveld claims that atheism is dead because it rests on mistaken and antiquated paradigms such as materialism or "scientism" (85), and he sets out to prove that these elder paradigms were indeed mistaken. Given his belief in the order and purposiveness of the universe as occasioned by God, Lelyveld logically takes umbrage at the existentialist notion of an absurd universe – instead, "the universe is inherently and beautifully logical" (107). In this respect, Lelyveld's thinking is closely related to that of Maybaum's. Instead of responding to Rubenstein with new insights, Lelyveld sometimes seems to return to all the arguments that bore the full brunt of Rubenstein's criticism. Thus, Lelyveld's resolve to believe in the Covenantal God of the Bible also tends to entail a minimization of the impact of the Holocaust: "Auschwitz introduces no new problems: it is the old problem of evil written large; it differs only quantitatively from prior problems" (110). As past generations have asserted their allegiance to the covenant, Lelyveld sees no reason why post-Holocaust generations should react otherwise. The fashionable outcries about the death of God are merely occasioned by a faulty understanding of God and His relationship to mankind. For, the God Lelyveld believes in is a God who makes demands upon his chosen people: "The God of Christianity is the God who *gives*; the God of Judaism is the God who *demand*s. ... The covenant obligation that is central in Judaism calls upon the Jew to be God's co-worker in perfecting the world -- not to be *saved* but to *participate* in the redemption of mankind" (158). In what seems a frontal attack on Rubenstein, Lelyveld posits that those who are disappointed in God after the Holocaust are so because they cherished a selfish belief in a God who was to pamper them and take care of them personally. Instead, they should be asking themselves "What does God ask of me?" (184). Jewish suffering during the Holocaust must then be seen in the framework of such divine demands. After Rubenstein's mordant criticism of the view -- expressed by Grüber and Maybaum -- that Hitler was God's instrument for punishing the Jews, Lelyveld obviously could no longer consider the Holocaust as *willed* by God. However, two particular trains of thought allow him to reassert his belief in the Covenant. First, Lelyveld asserts that the ways of God are not for man to scan, and the divine meaning of the Holocaust therefore escapes human understanding (177). This implies that the Holocaust was part of a greater divine plan, that almost six million Jews died for some greater good. Lelyveld even goes as far as to state that the Jewish victims of the Holocaust died willingly for this higher purpose: "As I cannot say that God 'willed' the death of the 6,000,000, so I certainly cannot 'praise Him for their death.' This to me is a repelling, blasphemous idea. But I cannot withdraw from the 6,000,000 the dignity that lies in recognition that there existed among them a willingness to die in fulfillment of a distinctive role" (178). To preempt Jewish disappointment with such a God, Lelyveld's God becomes not only a God of demand but also a God who allows for human freedom within the divine plan. While God controls the final outcome like a chess player who is certain of his final victory, the intermediate moves are unpredictable and therein lies human freedom. If people choose to use their freedom for evil, all God can do is to deplore their choice: "while I cannot say that God 'willed' Auschwitz, I can say that God 'wept' over Auschwitz" (181).

Written on the eve of the Six Day War, but published only in 1973 as a collection of essays, Eliezer Berkovits's *Faith after the Holocaust* was a second Jewish expression of Covenantal thinking, directed against radical theology. Berkovits distances himself from the "rather comfortable scholarship of the radical theologians," which he considers too far removed "from the universe of the concentration camps and the crematoria" (2) but, quite remarkably, he only discusses the *Christian* death of God theologians. He sees no consanguinity whatsoever between death of God thinking and Jewish theological despair originated by Auschwitz (50-66). As if Buber, Maybaum, Rubenstein, and Lelyveld had not uttered a word on Jewish theological matters, Berkovits now sets out "to define *the* Jewish position as it relates to the issues under discussion" (58; my emphasis). Like these authors, Berkovits considers the problem of faith presented by the Holocaust "not unique in the context of Jewish experience. ...

From the point of view of the problem, we have had innumerable Auschwitzes" (88-90). To deal with the present situation, one should simply consider how previous generations came to terms with disasters. Steven Katz has rightly criticized this view because it fails "to recognize the importance of reassessing traditional theological approaches in light of the Holocaust" (Krell 42, n.1). Still, Berkovits starts from a quite original and authentic premise. The question whether or not the modern Jew can abandon his faith in God because of the Holocaust should be considered in light of those who were originally confronted with this choice in the concentration camps. As both attitudes were embraced by the victims of the Holocaust, the contemporary Jew has no right to reject either alternative. The only honest attitude that is sufficiently respectful of the Jewish victims is "to remain at the threshold" (6) and to refrain from answering the question in the victims' stead. However, given that he is a covenantal thinker, Berkovits does make a choice between the two alternatives. In spite of his defense of the threshold position, he later openly rejects the theological view of the death of the biblical God after Auschwitz because this attitude, he argues, paradoxically leads to Nazism: "The tragic aspect of such a position we see in the fact that it presents us with one of the truly great triumphs of the Nazi German proposition. It is of the very essence of that proposition that there is no personal God who is concerned with justice, morality, or human suffering. Law and meaning are manmade, and the man is the Führer of a Teutonic master race. A negative response of the Jewish people to the Auschwitz experience, the response of religious denial, affirms the first part of the Nazi proposition, which is the premise to its teutonic conclusion ... It is tragic because it is the true Hitlerian victory, the victory over Judaism in the hearts and minds of Jews" (72). Instead, Berkovits argues, the greatest achievement for the persecuted Jew is the affirmation of his faith, by sanctifying the Lord's name at the moment of total abandonment by God. This is the highest form of *Kiddush haShem* (to choose death, rather than deny one's God; 80-81). Clearly, such statements do not accord with a respectful threshold position.

Berkovits rejects the biblical view -- propounded by Grüber -- that the Jews were punished for their sins: "It was injustice absolute. It was injustice countenanced by God. But if we hold onto our faith in a personal God, such absolute injustice cannot be a mere mishap in the divine scheme of things" (89). As a result, Berkovits introduces two perspectives on God, the first of which is pure Buber, the second unadulterated Lelyveld. He goes back to the idea of *hester panim* (shortly after Buber) that God was present but hidden during the Holocaust. For Berkovits, however, God did not hide His face in divine judgment, but turned away "from the evil perpetrated by man" (95). This proposition results in a theodic view already expressed by Lelyveld in his metaphor of God as the master chess player who, like Lelyveld's weeping God, "suffers because of what man does to himself and to his brother" (127). Thus, God created human beings who could freely choose between good and evil. Both poles were created by God, but he did not "determine in advance that one person be a *Sadiq* [righteous one], and another a *Rasha* [wicked one]" (104). The two alternatives cannot exist without one another, as one cannot really be considered "good" if one cannot freely choose to be evil instead. In other words, human beings ultimately decide about their fate. Still, Berkovits reaches a rather obscene conclusion when he attempts to explain the fate and the existence of the people of Israel as "God's challenge to man": "God, who leads man "without might and without power" sent his people [i.e. Jews] into the world without the might of power. This is the essence of the confrontation between Israel and the world. It was in this confrontation that Western man had to prove himself. God has pushed Israel right across the path of Christianity. Israel was God's question of destiny to Christendom. In its answer, the Christian world failed him tragically. Through Israel God tested Western man and found him wanting. This gruesome failure of Christianity has led the Western world to the greatest moral debacle of any civilization -- the Holocaust" (127). Logically unwilling to consider the Holocaust as divine punishment for sins committed by Israel, Berkovits ends up with the equally questionable alternative suggested by Maybaum: the people of Israel were punished for the sins of others; nearly six million Jews were killed because God wanted to test Western man and "found him wanting." De-

spite the miracle of the Remnant, this seems a very bleak basis to reaffirm one's belief in the Covenantal God.

The final Jewish voice in the 1960s theological debate about the Holocaust was Emil L. Fackenheim's *God's Presence in History*, published in 1970 but based on lectures dating from 1968. Fackenheim is a Canadian Jew who has emigrated to Israel, but his audience was primarily US-American (see Novick 332, n.123). His work provides a fine closure to the radical theology debate of the 1960s in that it explicitly rejects the prior theological explanations of the Holocaust, and introduces a new point of view that is arguably "the most compelling affirmation of the covenant in the post-Holocaust era" (Bennett 118). First, Fackenheim rejects the traditional, biblical view that interpreted suffering as deserved punishment. Such a response is totally inadequate for Fackenheim, as "in response to Auschwitz, it becomes a religious absurdity and even a sacrilege" (73; compare Rubenstein *Auschwitz* 66). Nor can Fackenheim accept the related but somewhat kinder view -- expressed by Maybaum and Lelyveld -- that the Jewish victims of the Holocaust died because of the sins of others. In order to be a martyr, one needs to have a choice, and at Auschwitz, there simply was no choice (74). Fackenheim also rejects the concept of *hester panim*, the hiding of the face of God -- further elaborated by Buber and Berkovits -- as it is equally bound to lead to despair. For, the divine self-concealment no longer seems partial and temporary as it had before, but lasting and absolute. Nor does Fackenheim see the point of a third alternative explanation, of Lelyveld's impotent, weeping God who "cried out every night in bitter lament" (28). For Fackenheim -- in clear opposition to Maybaum, Lelyveld, and Berkovits -- these ancient Midrashic frameworks fail to provide adequate answers, because "the Nazi holocaust has no precedent in ancient Jewish history -- or medieval or modern" (69). Even the fourth and final view, represented by Rubenstein, that "a God concerned with Auschwitz must have decreed Auschwitz, and such a God is dead" is merely "spurious" in Fackenheim's eyes, because the rabbis in the past did not despair when confronted with devastation (30-31). New times and unprecedented disasters call for new attitudes towards God, but despair is clearly not an option: "it is precisely because Auschwitz has made the world a desperate place that a Jew is forbidden to despair of it" (88). Whereas the radical theologians require the death of God in order to enjoy full human freedom, Fackenheim argues that Judaism sees God as a "commanding Presence [who] does not repress human freedom but exalts it; and a Jew singled out by that Presence does not groan under the burden of the law but rather rejoices in the commandments" (60).

What unites all Jews in the post-Holocaust world is precisely the commanding Voice that speaks from Auschwitz. This Voice adds a 614th commandment to the existing 613 commandments of the Torah. The passage that cites the commanding voice of Auschwitz is perhaps the most famous of post-Holocaust theology: "Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. ... A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work" (84). For Fackenheim, the commanding Voice of Auschwitz distinguishes between inauthentic Jews who flee from Jewishness, and authentic Jews --secularist or religious -- who heed the Voice and affirm their Jewishness. This passage occasioned acerbic criticism from Jacob Neusner: "Hitler hated Judaism, therefore we must be religious Jews ... The argument might enjoy a measure of historical pertinence if Hitler had distinguished among the Jews those who were religious or kept kosher or wore *tzitzit*. But since Nazism ignored the life-style of the Jews and sought only to end all Jewish life, the sole necessary consequence one can draw is that having Jewish babies -- however one raises them thereafter -- is a defeat for Hitler. The rest is either mere sentimentality or meretricious. ... Since Hitler liked Wagner and sauerkraut and did not like to see animals mistreated, are we to give

up *The Flying Dutchman* and cabbage and beat our dogs?" (79-80). Rubenstein criticized Fackenheim's view as well, because it cast those Jews who did despair of the Scriptural God "in the role of accomplices of Hitler;" and those who did not hear the commanding Voice at Auschwitz were depicted as "willfully rejecting God" (*History* 181). Nor does it seem likely, in Rubenstein's eyes, "that even a jealous God would require the annihilation of six million Jews as the occasion for a commandment forbidding Jews to permit the demise of their tradition" (*History* 182). Still, Fackenheim's response does not differ substantially from Rubenstein's, in that both theologians seem to advocate a Jewishness based on community, rather than on religious practices, though both adhere to a belief in God. While Fackenheim clings to the biblical God of Israel, Rubenstein pins his faith on a natural deity. And as Rubenstein's disappointment results in declaring the biblical God dead, Fackenheim's contentiousness with God leads the opposite result: "You have abandoned the covenant? We shall not abandon it! You no longer want Jews to survive? We shall survive, as better, more faithful, more pious Jews! You have destroyed all grounds for hope? We shall obey the commandment to hope which You Yourself have given!" (88).

The flood of publications of covenantal theologies such as those by Lelyveld, Berkovits, and Fackenheim suggests that Rubenstein's model was effectively warded off by the center of the religious system. John Carey notes that the initial cracks in radical theology appeared soon after its inception: "the movement seemed to be weakened with the coming of the spring of 1967. These theological ideas seemed most intense through the winter months, when life was bleak, cold and depressing. When spring came with warmth and flowers and renewal of nature, it seemed to somehow negate the claims of the various death of God theologians. It was a sign of renewal and hope, and conveyed to thousands that there was indeed a transforming power that spoke through nature" (86). Though correct in its assessment of the movement's initial decline, the observation disregards the importance of the historical context and of culture's systemic interaction. For, more relevant than the mere arrival of Spring, was the impressive victory of Israel in the Six Day War of June 1967. Rubenstein's radical theology had chiefly been fed by his disappointment in God after the Holocaust. This thinking drastically changed in 1967, when the Israeli victory was couched in religious terms as divine retribution for the horrors of the Holocaust. It proved that the Jews were still God's chosen people. For many, the event was nothing short of a direct manifestation of God (see, e.g., Bennett 117; Neusner 63; Fackenheim 86). As Eugene Borowitz notes: "theologically put, it made evident what the Holocaust had made us doubt: that the Covenant between God and the people of Israel continued in full force" (400). Though radical theology was made obsolete by this "renewal and hope," the movement had made its indelible mark on the US-American religious system. While its reality model never met with significant reproduction or institutional support, it did compel US-American theology finally to deal with the hitherto neglected problem of the Holocaust and its inevitable consequences for US-American religious belief. What it shows is that subversive cultural elements can indeed exert a remarkable influence and occasion a dramatic shift in the system's central repertoires, even if these elements remain merely peripheral.

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