

The Universal and the Particular: Twin Foci in Holocaust Education

That the Holocaust has a particular dimension goes without saying (except for Holocaust deniers). Jews were its main target and its primary victims. Sixty-five years after the end of World War II, the event remains in the forefront of the consciousness of many, probably most, individual Jews and of the collective consciousness and identity of Jewish communities everywhere. If anything, its import has grown over the years.

That the Holocaust has universal dimensions is less of a given. There are Jews who feel the catastrophe belongs to them alone, that any discussion of universal significance in some way diminishes their suffering; there are gentiles who agree, denying that the event has any relevance for non-Jews; and there are Jews and gentiles who fear that comparing the Holocaust to other events lessens its enormity and uniqueness. In fact, however, there are good reasons for everyone to see not only the particular but also the universal dimensions and significance of the Holocaust.

For one thing, the event took place in a gentile context, Europe, the heartland of Western civilization. Almost all of its perpetrators, moreover, had a Christian background. Although many were not “good” Christians or even practicing Christians, church teachings had been part of their education. Some of the Nazi leaders were communicants of the traditional churches, which continued to exert considerable influence over the broad public in Nazi dominated Europe. The relevance of the Holocaust for Christians, for all Europeans, therefore, is no less, and in some ways, even greater than for Jews. For scholars, for policy makers, for all people of good will, it is actually more important to understand the perpetrators and the bystanders, than it is the victims, although, of course, all three groups are inextricably bound together. The suffering and death of the victims was not an “act of God” (of which more presently); it was caused by other human beings and watched (or ignored) by many more. Furthermore, the Holocaust was an integral part of German war strategy, not an aberration committed by a minority of perverts inspired by an obsessive maniac. Finally, if the Holocaust was a unique event with no similarity to any other, then there is nothing to learn from it, there are no lessons for the present or future.

What heightens the importance of understanding the Holocaust is that the Christian and European constructs of “the Jew” and of Judaism that in many ways led up to it are once again part of public dis-

course. While now they frequently appear in the guise of opposition to the existence of Israel (anti-Zionism), they employ many of the old tropes. As before, they are part of an attack on Western culture and civilization with their Judaeo-Christian roots, and they highlight the folly of considering the Holocaust exclusively in a Jewish context.

Universality with regard to Holocaust education has another meaning, too. The event needs to be examined through a variety of lenses, a range of academic disciplines. The reasons are several (Brown, 1991, 9-14). History (social, political, and military), theology (of Judaism and Christianity, at least), literature (fiction, poetry, and memoir), sociology, psychology, and politics are well established as paths of inquiry into the Holocaust and its aftermath. Recently, Götz Aly, Gordon J. Horwitz, and others have identified economic issues crucial to its understanding. Each of these disciplines, and perhaps others, as well, offers its own insights. If the Holocaust can be apprehended at all, it is only through a consideration of its multi-dimensional aspects.

Broadening the scope of the discussion beyond any one discipline or particular group does not mean, however, the substitution of “vague inclusive categories of victim...for the specific national [and religious] processes that can promote hatred,” as Professor Ruth Wisse of Harvard University has put it. Wisse is surely right, as well, in claiming that “self-absorption” is not helpful in dealing with the Holocaust. It leads to the placing of blame incorrectly on the victim (undated letter [1994] to the author).

Pedagogical Background

Let me begin with some comments about the contexts of my own teaching in order to make clear my point of departure. I do this in explanation of why my comments deal with some topics and not others, and as a reminder of the extent to which the intellectual and emotional freight we carry influences our conceptual frameworks. Also, the “tools” with which we work, that is, the methodologies of our disciplines, have much to do with shaping those frameworks. And there can be no doubt that the particular setting of my own teaching has colored the way in which I think about education and the Holocaust.

Although I am a historian, I have some training and interest in literature and in religion. At York University, I am appointed to the Departments of Languages (Hebrew) and History, but my home unit is Humanities, a multidisciplinary department of people whose fields include history, philosophy, literature, classics, and religion. It is a department that encourages interdisciplinary team-teaching. The Holocaust is not the primary area of my research. It is, however, a subject about which I have published and which I have been teaching for more than 30 years. I initiated what is probably the first course on the Holocaust in a Canadian university, “Perspectives on the Holocaust,” a Humanities course, which employs the methodologies of history, literature, and religion to consider a wide range of views about various

aspects of the subject. The course looks at the Holocaust in the context of Jewish history, certainly, but also in the contexts of Jewish and Christian theology, German history and antisemitism, eastern European history, and world politics (that is, the roles in the Holocaust played by the British, the Jewish community in pre-state Israel, the United States, Canada, and other countries). We consider both the prelude and the aftermath of the Holocaust. At first, the course attracted mostly Jewish students. In recent years, more than half of the students have been non-Jews, including students of east Asian and south Asian background. The academic discipline of many is Religious Studies.

In the summer of 2001, Professor Mark Webber, a friend and colleague whose field is German literature, and I launched a new teaching initiative. We took a group of 20 students to Germany and Poland for almost a month of Holocaust field study. Ten of the students were Canadians from York University including one French Canadian; six were Polish; four were German. Part of the seminar was a ten-day follow-up symposium at York designed to further students' knowledge of racism and its consequences (especially in the Canadian setting) and to explore ways of bringing their experience to bear on their future teaching. Somewhat larger groups were enrolled in the four subsequent cycles of the field study. Students in all the groups have been future educators. As experienced teachers, we knew that no education program by itself could hope to effect widespread change in attitudes and behavior. Consequently, we decided to focus on educators for the multiplier effect. One hundred teachers in a lifetime of teaching would reach tens of thousands of students.

Although the conception of the trip was ours, sponsorship has come from various sources in Canada, Germany, and Poland. In Poland, we have a partner university, the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan, and we have cooperated, as well, with the Pedagogical University in Kraków. In Germany, we have received support from the Heinrich Böll Foundation, the charitable arm of the Greens Party, the Hertie Foundation, the Department of Civic Education of the province of Baden-Württemberg, and the Trans-Atlantic Program of the Federal Government. In Canada, we have received support from the Department of Canadian Heritage of the Government of Canada, from private individuals, most especially, Gail and Mark Appel of Toronto for whom the program is named, and from York University. The trinational make-up of the group, as well as its religious composition (Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Hindus, a Muslim, and a number of students who were outspokenly unchurched) invited, indeed required the ability on the part of participants and instructors to understand different points of view and different frameworks for dealing with the Holocaust. These included some for which I had relatively little sympathy at the outset but for which I have gained appreciation over time.

That I have been engaged for more than three decades in teaching about the Holocaust to non-Jews leads me naturally away from approaching the topic in an exclusively Jewish context, although I take care, I believe, never to lose sight of the event's particular significance for Jews, including me, and Judaism. My departmental home at York leads me towards a multidisciplinary approach to teaching, in general. But the idiosyncrasies of my pedagogical setting are not the only forces that shape my teaching. I teach as I do, because I believe it is particularly appropriate to the Holocaust. Professor Yehuda Bauer of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem puts the case for a broad approach this way:

[The] Holocaust has become a world issue. It has had an enduring impact on contemporary civilization and continues to shape, at least indirectly, the fate of nations. For its impact to effect mutual understanding, widespread peace, and active, full-scale opposition to genocidal events, we all have to rethink what happened then (Bauer 260).

To conclude this introductory apologia, I want to return to the alarming connection between contemporary events and the Holocaust to which I alluded earlier. George Mosse, Norman Cohn, Joshua Trachtenberg, Karl Schleuness, and many others have traced the path from fantastic conspiracy theories regarding Jews and Judaism to the Holocaust. These same fantasies are now being propagated in Iran and in the Arab world, as well as in Europe and the Americas, and they are being used as they were by the Nazis, as disinformation to conceal a real worldwide conspiracy. One seemingly benign form of the fantasies is the notion of "root causes," placing Israel and its dispute with the Palestinians at the center of the conflict of between Islamist "extremists" and the United States (or the West). That so many in the media and in government accept this premise may stem in part from a failure to learn the universal lessons of the Holocaust. Therein lies potential danger for Jews in Israel and elsewhere and for others, as well. In 2001 in the wake of 9/11, Ariel Sharon, then prime minister of Israel, spoke of an analogy between Czechoslovakia in 1938 and contemporary Israel. (For a critique of both the timing and the content of Sharon's remark, see Avineri.) More accurately, one might draw a comparison between the Jews in 1938 and Jews in the present day, especially in Israel. (Perhaps it is necessary to add, that my comments are not meant to defend all or any Israeli policies. Rather, they are meant to highlight the singular language of demonization used by many opponents of those policies and the attempts to cast out Israel alone from the family of nations for its "sins," while ignoring the similar or worse actions of other nations.)

Illustrative Issues

At this point, I should like to suggest two central arenas in which the Holocaust played out, which illustrate its particular and universal aspects: religion and nationalism. These are issues with specific loci, Jewish and non-Jewish. In general, they have significance

beyond any one group or field of inquiry. Particularities together constitute one way of expressing the universality of the Holocaust. Let me start with religion, then, wherein some of the most troubling questions posed by the Holocaust are raised. No religion that posits a God who is an arbiter of justice and an exemplar of love and mercy can avoid a reexamination of its tenets in light of the Holocaust. As suggested at the outset, the problems are especially acute for Judaism, the religion of the victims, and Christianity, the religion of most of the perpetrators and proximate bystanders.

One can state the main problem for Judaism simply (perhaps simplistically): A (the?) cardinal sin of Judaism is apostasy. During the Holocaust, however, Jews were murdered precisely because their ancestors had refused to apostasize. Had the grandparents renounced their faith, the grandchildren would not have been classified as Jews by the Nazis and would have been spared. To be sure, a number of theologians, among them, Richard Rubenstein (1966), Eliezer Berkovits (1973, 1979), and Bradley Artson (2010-2011), have recognized this problem and addressed the Holocaust as a theological novum. Mainstream, popular religious culture, in general, however, has not. And even academic theologians have avoided the particular problem for the covenant posed by the issue of apostasy. As Professor David Roskies of the Jewish Theological Seminary has put it: "The rabbis of Yavneh have yet to reply [to the Holocaust] (Roskies 15-52)."

That is to say, despite its scope, ferocity, and possible implications for core tenets of Jewish faith, the Holocaust continues to be seen by many Jews as one of a series of catastrophes understood as divine punishment for sin. In that view, then, the Holocaust is simply a modern example of evil, different in scope perhaps from those of the past, but not in kind. Avoidance of the special theological problem posed by the Holocaust may reflect an unwillingness to confront traditional explanations of historical catastrophes or an inability to face the theological consequences of the Holocaust. A further implication of such a point of view, may be that none of the catastrophes of Jewish history should be seen in the way the tradition has suggested, that none was God's punishment for human shortcomings. To some, the implication may be that God's covenant relationship with the Jewish people has ended, or that there is no God (Roskies 15-52). An examination of liturgical texts is instructive.

As might be expected, the *haredim* (ultra-Orthodox) have been most adamant in maintaining that the Holocaust was a "normal" event in the historical continuum. Once more Jews sinned, and God punished them. The putative sins range from abandonment of the traditional norms of belief and behavior, especially in Germany, America, and Israel, to Zionism (reconstituting a Jewish state without messianic sanction). It follows that the memorial prayer for the dead ("*Yizkor*") printed in *haredi* prayer books does not mention the Holocaust at all. Presumably its victims are included in the traditional prayer for

martyrs who chose to die for their faith. Since it is unthinkable in the post-Holocaust world for Jews to recite this prayer without thinking of the Holocaust, the supplicant is led to infer a seamless, if painful, historical experience in which Jews have repeatedly been called upon to sacrifice their lives for their faith. The Holocaust was nothing new! (For example, *Mahzor Rabba – Yom Hakippurim*)

Such an approach cannot be very satisfying even to the *haredim*. For one thing, it ignores the fact that vast numbers of the Holocaust “martyrs” were not Orthodox Jews; many were not believers at all. None, moreover, had a choice about dying; they cannot be said to have chosen death “to sanctify God’s name,” as the traditional prayer asserts. Furthermore, the sector of the Jewish population that suffered the greatest proportional losses during the Holocaust was that of the pietist *haredim* of eastern Europe, who had faithfully resisted the emoluments of modernity including emigration. The “sinners” in America and the land of Israel went unscathed. Would a just and merciful God choose to punish most those very Jews who were, supposedly, doing His will, while keeping safe those who were supposedly rebelling against Him?

The question is not faced any more squarely in non-*haredi* prayer books. The very popular Art Scroll prayer books are published in several versions tailored to the beliefs of various sectors of the Orthodox community. In the version endorsed by the “modern Orthodox” or “centrist” Rabbinical Council of America, the “*Yizkor*” prayer, as in *haredi* prayer books, makes no mention of the Holocaust, presenting its readers only with the traditional words in memory of “martyrs of the faith.” Interestingly, that same prayer book does add a special memorial prayer “FOR [FALLEN] MEMBERS OF THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCE” (sic), in apparent recognition of Israel as a theological novum (*Rabbinical Council of America Art Scroll Siddur* 812). One Israeli prayer book used by some modern Orthodox Jews there, *Tfila: Lifnei Mi Ata Omed* includes a special prayer for Holocaust victims in its “*Yizkor*” memorial prayer (271).

In the “*Eileh Ezkerah*” martyrology prayer recited on the Day of Atonement, the older (Silverman) High Holiday prayer book still in use in some North-American synagogues of the Conservative Movement, includes passages in English referring to the Holocaust. But these are introduced by the traditional words: “We have sinned... Pardon us, our Rock, our Father!” and followed by the words, “Remember for our merit, the covenant [You made] with our forefathers!” (Silverman 381-385) To the theological challenges presented by the Holocaust, this non-Orthodox prayer book offers only the traditional answers: “The punishment was deserved [implicitly, at least]. They suffered, and therefore, God, remember us, their ‘descendants,’ for good!” A newer High Holiday prayer book of the Conservative Movement is similarly reserved. The words, “We have sinned... Pardon us!” remain as the introduction to the “*Eileh Ezkerah*” martyrology, and

the words, "Remember for our merit [Your] covenant with our forefathers!" conclude it, a tacit acceptance of the traditional explanation for suffering. In between, are passages, mostly in English, that group together the catastrophes of Jewish history from the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 532 BCE to the Holocaust. Again, there is no perception of anything new in the Holocaust (Harlow 552-570).

The newest Conservative-Movement, High Holiday prayer book, while theologically quite innovative, in general, is almost as traditional in dealing with the Holocaust as its predecessors. Again, in the "*Eileh Ezkerah*" martyrology, the Holocaust is mentioned as but one, if the most recent, of Jewish historical catastrophes that began with the slaughter of the rabbinical leadership by the Romans and continued through the persecutions of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain and Portugal. A hint of the unique theological problem posed by the Holocaust comes only in a gloss: a poem, "Smoke," by the Yiddish poet, Jacob Glatstein (1896-1971). The poem concludes with the lines: "And above, in the high heavens,/ Sacred smoke prays and weeps,/ God – where you are – /we all disappear." Here is recognition of the novum, of the challenge to traditional Jewish (and I might add, Christian and Muslim) belief presented by the Holocaust, but still *sotto voce*, a major challenge writ small in a gloss, no more (Feld 341).

My strong impression is that this business-as-usual attitude of popular religious culture has proved highly unsatisfactory as a response to post-Holocaust theological searching, and it may well contribute to the spiritual malaise of many contemporary Jews. To the extent that the traditional response involves "self-blame," it serves to reinforce inappropriate guilt feelings on the part of survivors and the community as a whole and to misdirect inward, efforts to prevent future catastrophes (Wisse 24-31). Ignoring the theological challenges of the Holocaust leads some Jews to erect for themselves a faith based on a falsehood. Whatever the "practical" implications of Jewish liturgical responses to the Holocaust, one who would understand the effects of the Holocaust must be aware of those responses.

Christian reactions to the Holocaust have included triumphalist pronouncements like that of Dean Heinrich Grüber of the Lutheran Evangelical Church in Germany. These rehearse the traditional idea that Jews will be punished until they recognize the messiahship of Jesus. (The remarkable aspect of Grüber's triumphalism is that during the Nazi era, he made great efforts to ameliorate the lot of Jews, and afterwards he was a strong advocate of *Wiedergutmachung*, attempting to make up for the past.) (Rubenstein 48-57) Many Christians, however, have recognized that the Holocaust represents as much of a challenge to their faith, the faith of the perpetrators, as it does to Judaism. Simply put (perhaps again, simplistically), Christians must answer the question, "How can adherents of a religion that teaches mercy and love as its highest values have participated in the mass murder of Jews (to

say nothing of the murder of the disabled and of Sinti and Roma), in many cases with the conviction that their faith justified such acts?" I often state the case in bold, if provocative terms: In 1942 a Roman Catholic who divorced his/her spouse was excommunicated. A Roman Catholic who murdered a Jew was not. Christians also need to grapple with matricide, since most of them recognize the parental relationship of Judaism to Christianity and, more often than not, have understood themselves to have some obligations to Jews and Judaism stemming from that relationship.

A number of Christian churches including the largest, the Roman Catholic, have taken account of the role of their communicants (and officiants, in some cases) in the Holocaust and sought to make amends. Openness to Jews and Judaism is now quite common, certainly in North America and western Europe, as it was not in the pre-Holocaust era. The theological revisions that came about as a result of the Catholic Church's Ecumenical Council, Vatican II, held between 1962 and 1965, owed a great deal to the rethinking of Church dogma in light of the Holocaust. A recent book by Pope Benedict XVI goes even further, making explicit the falsehood of the traditional claim based on the Gospels, that "the Jews" were responsible for the crucifixion; it argues that Jesus' blood cried out for reconciliation and not vengeance (Ratzinger 2011).

The actions of Pope John Paul II, pontiff from 1978 to 2005, are, perhaps, more telling than the theological revisions. His visits to Auschwitz, to the Great Synagogue in Rome, the first by a reigning pope to a synagogue, and to Israel, and the diplomatic recognition accorded to Israel by the Vatican during his papacy marked a sharp departure from the practices of earlier years. His moving speech of contrition at Yad VaShem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, in March 2000 is emblematic of the shift. He said:

As bishop of Rome and successor of the Apostle, Peter, I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church, motivated by the Gospel law of truth and love, and by no political considerations, is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place.

In the speech, the pope went on to call for the mutual respect of Jews and Christians. As a result of the rethinking, Christians of several denominations now pray with altered texts, engage in interfaith dialogue, desist from attempts to convert Jews, perhaps even commemorate Passover or Holocaust Remembrance Day in their churches, and, if they are German, may do volunteer service work with individual Jews or Jewish or Polish communities through religious organizations such as Action Reconciliation, Service for Peace.

Still, while penance is being done, some of the main questions have not been addressed and cannot easily be answered; they may yet prove to be very damaging to Christian faith. The behavior of Pope John Paul II is again illustrative (Carroll 52-69). Despite his many

steps towards reconciliation with Judaism, he proceeded with the canonization of Edith Stein as a Christian martyr. But Stein, a nun, was a convert to Catholicism, who was murdered as a Jew in the Holocaust, not for her Christian faith. More damaging still to Christian-Jewish relations has been the move to canonize Pope Pius XII, the wartime pope whose record regarding Jews has been an issue of debate. Professor Kevin Madigan of the Harvard Divinity School lays out the problem:

The church has devoted a great deal of effort in recent decades to defending Pius XII against accusations of indifference about or even complicity in the Holocaust. As such, proclaiming his innocence and downplaying the unhappy facts about his reluctance to take on the Nazis has become... an article of faith for many Catholics. Indeed, the move to grant him sainthood is seen by many...as an appropriate response to charges they have come to see as a blanket accusation against their entire church (Madigan 32).

Until the Vatican opens its wartime archives, the debate is unlikely to be resolved.

With regard to other churches, responses to the Intifadas and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in general, especially on the part of many liberal, mainstream Protestant church people, indicate that anti-semitism and anti-Judaism, now often subtle and submerged, have hardly disappeared from their consciousness. Evangelicals, on the other hand, tend to be very vocal in their support of Israel. But many suspect that at the heart of that support is the expectation of the second coming of Jesus and the final conversion of the Jews.

Religious doctrine is only one area where multiple viewpoints and disciplines are necessary for understanding both the Holocaust itself and its implications. Another is nationalism, particularly in Europe, but perhaps no less in the United States, Canada, and even Israel. Perhaps all nationalism has a strain of racism running through it, although the definition of "race" may well be open-ended and related more to geography, culture, and language than to biology. At the very least, nationalism – all nationalism – is exclusionary, as any group identity is by definition. Individuals and national groups need an ego to function. But the Holocaust should serve as a warning regarding the extremes to which national ego can go, when unrestrained by a national superego.

In Germany, the Holocaust should spark – and has – serious thinking about the nature of the nation. How did it become possible to read Jews out of the body politic and the body social? What does it mean to be German after the Holocaust, and what kind of education will lead to healthy "Germanness"? These questions have troubled thinking Germans for the more than 60 years since the end of World War II. They have been and are being addressed in a variety of educational settings: schools, museums, memorial sites, churches, and special organizations established for the purpose of rectifying

the past, and Holocaust education has been an integral part of that effort.

But there has been a vigorous debate in Germany in recent years over the extent to which it remains appropriate for education and public consciousness to continue to focus on the Holocaust. Immigrants from Turkey or the Palestinian territories have special difficulty understanding why they should relate to this aspect of the German past, but not only they (Stricker, Griglewski). We may note that just as the reconstruction of the Jewish people has undermined its ability to focus on matters of the national spirit, the reconstruction of Germany while maintaining consciousness of the Holocaust has undermined Germans' ability to focus on their national spirit (Schweid, Maier, Baldwin). But studying history in Germany, as elsewhere, is not only a means for understanding the past, but also a way of shaping the character of the present and future. Studying the history of German Jewry and the Holocaust leads to consideration of the place of the large Turkish minority in present-day Germany and of multiculturalism as a political and social organizing concept. Ironically, it has also led to interest in various aspects of Jewish culture, including klezmer music and the Yiddish language, which were viewed with disdain by pre-Holocaust German Jews. More "authentic" aspects of the German-Jewish past can be seen in the Jewish museums of Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt/Main, Fürth, and other centers.

The German students with whom we worked in the field study illustrate the success of Holocaust education in Germany. They know a great deal about the event and show eagerness to learn about Jews and Judaism and about racism in contemporary German society. Two had volunteered for work in concentration camp museums, another cleaning up the Warsaw Jewish cemetery, and others with Action Reconciliation in Israel. They express embarrassment regarding the German past, although they understand that they personally bear no guilt for acts they did not commit. Many have difficulty "taking pride in being German" and feel responsible for the future. All are acutely sensitive to manifestations of prejudice in the present-day world. Some understand the nexus between anti-Israel sentiment and anti-semitism; others vehemently deny that there is any connection at all. But these students are self-selected and not necessarily representative. As they themselves say, much remains to be done in Germany if the lessons of the Holocaust are to be universally assimilated.

Poland is a different case from Germany. Poles are acutely conscious of the suffering inflicted upon their nation by their powerful neighbors. They still have not completely put behind them the anxieties of the inter-war period, when non-Polish ethnics – chiefly Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Germans, Jews, and others – constituted over a third of the total population. They are very much aware that in the last two and a half centuries, Poland has enjoyed only brief periods of independence. Fervent Catholicism has been integral to Polish na-

tionalism. The result of all these factors has been a heightened, sensitive, sometimes defensive nationalism tinged with inferiority feelings, xenophobia, religious exclusivity, and antisemitism. All this is changing rapidly.

There can be no doubt that Jews were badly treated in the inter-war period, as well as during and after the Holocaust, by many Poles. It is also true that Poles represent the largest national group of people honored by Yad VaShem, the Israeli Holocaust Memorial, for saving Jews during the Holocaust. Although Jews are a negligible minority in Poland today, antisemitism is not entirely a thing of the past. It can still be a factor in politics; university students enrolling in courses dealing with Judaism sometimes manifest passive antisemitism and sometimes give expression to quite negative feelings about Jews (Ivanov 171-177). A number of the few Jews in Poland tell stories of discrimination and sometimes violence against them and of fear of their neighbors, and many contemporary Poles excuse the treatment of Jews by citing their own suffering. On the other hand, there is broad popular support for Israel in Poland, perhaps partly in recognition of the geopolitical similarities between the two countries. The task of Holocaust education in Poland is to create a mindset which can comprehend the pain inflicted by Poles as well as that suffered by them, and, as well, to highlight the contributions of Jews and other "non-Poles" to Polish culture and society. These are increasingly important tasks, as Poland looks westward and faces immigration pressure from less prosperous countries to the east.

Here, too, our students and faculty are both illustrative and instructive. At the start of the seminar, Polish students tend to be very sensitive about any hint of criticism of Poland. Any mention of the Holocaust can elicit a demand to consider the suffering of Poland at the hands of the Germans and the communists. I confess that such concerns forced me to think very seriously about Poland's travails and to appreciate them. But just as I reexamined my views, the Polish students have reexamined theirs and, I think, gained more appreciation of Jews and Judaism and especially of the Holocaust.

In Poland as in Germany, rethinking is being pushed along by schools, museums, scholarly books, folk festivals, the Jewish theater, and other institutions. The Polish pavilion at the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial site includes the story of the destruction of Polish Jewry as an integral part of its presentation, as does the Museum of the '44 Uprising in Warsaw. The example of Pope John Paul II, a native son of whom Poles are enormously proud, was very influential in changing Polish attitudes towards Jews and the Holocaust. Three books of Professor Jan Gross, a historian and sociologist who teaches at Princeton University, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne*, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz*, and *Golden Harvest* (the last available only in Polish in May 2011), brought home to Poles the destructive reality of Polish antisemitism during the Ho-

locaust and immediately after. Although many in Poland and abroad considered Gross's books unfair, they sparked a national debate and furthered public determination to ensure that the Poland of the future will be different from the Poland of the past. Also influential in stimulating change is the work of Dr. Piotr Trojański of the Pedagogical University in Kraków, a participant in our program. He and his colleagues have prepared a national curriculum for secondary schools to teach about pre-war Polish Jewry and the Holocaust. A recent play by Tadeusz Słobodzianek, "Our Class," is another milestone in the cultural shift. As elsewhere, of course, much remains to be done in Poland.

And what about Jewish ethnic and Israeli national education in light of the Holocaust? Here we return to the particular, although still with an eye on the universal. Are any of the issues being raised in Germany and Poland apposite to Israeli realities? When the Holocaust is taught in a Jewish setting, what national implications are students meant to draw? I shall limit myself to just a few comments and perhaps idiosyncratic examples.

While Jews were at the center of the Holocaust, its significance is not limited to Jews, as noted here more than once. On the other hand, if the Holocaust is racism run amok, it is not *merely* racism or genocide. Jewish victimhood is not unrelated to that of others, but it has its singular characteristics, as Yehuda Bauer pointed out in his 1998 address to the Bundestag (Bauer 261-273). When Jews teach about the Holocaust to Jews, then, the goal is threefold: to reinforce Jewish identity in spite of the Holocaust; to see Jews as part of an international and historical community of victims; to acknowledge that Jews, like all other people, have the potential for victimizing others. The last is a danger that the Torah itself warns against repeatedly, commanding the Israelites not to mistreat the stranger, "For you, yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:30, 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 17:19). Jewish tradition mandates that victims use their suffering as a building block of *tikun olam*, the repair of the world.

Two examples of Israeli literature that I should like to mention here are instructive. They are certainly not representative of the range of attitudes in Israel or among Jews elsewhere today. Many, perhaps most, Jews interpret the Holocaust as an object lesson in the consequences of weakness and dependence on others. And yet, the lessons of the Holocaust are complex and contradictory for Israelis and other Jews, as these two texts illustrate. One, "The Prisoner," a short story by S. Yizhar, was written at the time of Israel's War of Independence, just three years after the end of the Holocaust. The other, *The Seventh Day*, is a record of discussions held just after the Six Day War in 1967 among soldiers with a kibbutz background.

"The Prisoner" is a story of the 1948-49 Israeli War of Independence. An Arab shepherd is captured by a rag-tag, ill trained, inchoate

group of soldiers formed from all strata of society, the cultured and the uneducated, farmers and city folk, high earners and the unemployed, the sophisticated and the rough-edged, native sons and immigrants just off the boat. Although it is not stated in the story, in 1948 the Israelis were vastly outnumbered and poorly equipped. Also not stated, but fresh in the minds of the soldiers and the contemporaneous readers of "The Prisoner" is the real-life story of a patrol that had recently released an Arab captive on condition that he not reveal their position. He did, however, and the 35 soldiers were ambushed and slaughtered to a man. The soldiers here try to induce the shepherd to reveal information, which he does or doesn't have. The story has no end; we can only imagine the shepherd's fate.

What is remarkable about Yizhar's tale is his depiction of the soldiers. They treat the Arab roughly, taking umbrage at his assertion of humanity by asking for a cigarette. The images evoked ("spiked boots," "increasingly skillful" kicks, soldiers having a laugh at the expense of their hapless, "primitive" captive) echo those of German soldiers and Jewish victims during the Holocaust. Such imagery so soon after the Holocaust surely outraged many of Yizhar's readers. But they knew that the author was a member of the mainstream Israeli establishment, not a fringe voice, but the outstanding writer of the early statehood generation; he could not be brushed off lightly. (Later he served as a member of the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, representing Mapai, the Labor Party.) Readers understood that the message of the story was not a facile equation, Jews=Nazis. Rather, Yizhar is making the point that all wars brutalize. Ordinary men and women from all walks of life turn beastly in combat. Even the victims of the Holocaust, perhaps especially they, need to learn that lesson, to remember that not long before, they were "strangers in the land of Egypt."

After the fact, the Six-Day War in 1967 appears to have been an Israeli romp. But in the weeks before, Israel was threatened on three sides (the fourth was the Mediterranean) by Arab armies backed by the Russians. Israelis were greatly outnumbered and faced annihilation. All reserves were mobilized weeks before war broke out. The army command surely worried about defeat, but they also worried about the moral fibre of the troops. They distributed for reading and discussion in the various units copies of "The Prisoner" with its not very subtle analogy of Israelis to Nazis. It was meant as a cautionary tale for those about to engage in a life-and-death battle.

The Seventh Day is also a remarkable document. Its disquieting analogies between the fate of Jews during the Holocaust and the fate of Palestinians in 1967 are further illustrations of the success of Holocaust education in Israel both in its particular and its universal dimensions. Menahem [Shelach] was born in Yugoslavia in 1934 and grew up there during the Holocaust years. He writes:

I felt uneasy about being a victorious army... If I had any clear awareness of the World War years and the fate of European Jewry it was once when I

was going up the Jericho road and the refugees were going down it. I identified directly with them. When I saw parents dragging their children along by the hand, I actually almost saw myself being dragged along by my own father... This was perhaps the tragic thing, that the identification had to be with the other side, with our enemies. (Shapira et al 180)

But this is only one aspect of Holocaust education among Israelis. In discussions with our field study group, the Europeans and the gentile Canadians perceived another. They expressed discomfort with the behavior they observed among Israeli groups visiting the camps. They found displays of solidarity (an echo, perhaps, of the old canard of Jewish clannishness?) offputting, and flying the Israeli colors inappropriate. The Germans, Poles, and Canadians professed to have no special feeling for their own flags and claimed that flag waving was an anachronistic, even a discreditable act.

At Treblinka, I spent a few minutes with a high school group from Petach Tikva, a suburb of Tel Aviv. The teacher told me this was a “roots” trip, an odd description, I thought, since the Holocaust is about uprooting. We were at the bleakest of all sites, a place where some 800,000 Jews were murdered, where the average life span of a Jew was about two hours. When the Israeli group raised their flag and quietly sang their national anthem, “HaTikva” (The Hope), my spirits were raised a bit. For me (and I think for them), these were assertions, that, in spite of what had happened at that place, in spite of what the Nazis and their collaborators had intended, the Jewish people is alive. For me and for those students, it was a vital and encouraging message. One goal of Holocaust education for Jews was addressed at that moment. Whether the other two were, I am not so sure, but not every moment is appropriate for every educational task.

My sense of trips – Israeli, North-American, or international – to the camps is that, on the whole, they do not attempt to keep the universal focus of Holocaust education in mind. Our seminar does, through sessions on German and Polish attitudes towards foreigners today, on the fate of Poles, Sinti, Roma, and others during the Holocaust period, and on the Nazis’ “euthanasia” program for the mentally and physically challenged, which proved to be a run-up to the Holocaust. Our follow-up symposium focuses on Canada as a multicultural society which has learned some lessons from the Holocaust period, although it is hardly without its problems today, as noted earlier. But ours was not a Jewish group, and it is possible that students in the group feel that we deal adequately only with Jewish topics.

Finally, a word about the bystanders, yet another group heavily implicated in the Holocaust. And since we are all bystanders at one time or another, this is a category that is indeed universal. Here I want to focus on Canada, which is one of my primary fields of research. Canada is widely admired today as a model of tolerance and democracy and an exemplar of multiculturalism. Toronto is arguably the world’s most multicultural city. It has almost as many Jews as Haifa; it

has more Italians than any but the largest cities in Italy; it has a very large Portuguese population, a growing Muslim presence, and a non-white majority made up of people from the Far East, the Indian subcontinent, Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and elsewhere. The small synagogue to which I belong has members who come from South Africa, North Africa, Costa Rica, the United States, Israel, eastern Europe, and all over Canada.

But this open Canada actually has a short history. As recently as the 1950s, Canada was a racist, xenophobic country inhospitable to people of color and to most others who came from places other than the British Isles, the United States, or Francophone Europe. In the official newspeak of an earlier era, Jews (and others from southern and eastern Europe) were “non-preferred” immigrants.

As a dominion of the British Empire, Canada joined the Allies fighting the Axis powers almost immediately after the outbreak of World War II. The Canadian contribution to the war effort was considerable for a country of some 10 million people, and casualties were heavy. At the same time, however, antisemitism was rife, and the doors were closed to Jewish refugees. In the 1930s, the New School for Social Research in New York hired about the same number of refugee scholars as all Canadian universities together (Brown forthcoming). In proportion to its population, Canada admitted fewer Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe than any other Western country – a mere 5000 from 1933 to 1945. And well into the 1950s, it was easier for veterans of the Wehrmacht or of Ukrainian Waffen SS units to gain entry into Canada than it was for Jewish survivors of the camps (Troper and Weinfeld). How the radical shift came about is not a story for here. Suffice to note, that, in part, it occurred when Canadians began to come to terms with the role they had played as bystanders to the murder of European Jewry. A catalyst in the process was a seminal work by Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948*. (See also, Walker and Eisenstadt.)

For a number of reasons, the Holocaust is taught in many Canadian secondary schools. It is an intimate and immediate part of the experience of one of the country’s major ethnic groups, the Jews, about half of whom are Holocaust survivors or their descendants. It is also of importance to other Canadians in light of their particular history. At the same time, it is of universal significance to contemporary Canadians, a reminder of how tortuous the path to tolerance and multiculturalism has been. There is an additional reason for promoting study of the Holocaust. Canadians tend to smugness regarding the virtues of their society, and, partly because of their proximity to the United States, they often side with the perceived underdog in international disputes, whatever the virtues of either side. This frequently translates into kneejerk public and media condemnation of Israel with an undertone of earlier antisemitism. Here, too, the Holocaust in its particularity and its universality may serve contemporary social and political ends.

Conclusion

Here I have tried to show how both the particular and universal foci are essential for education about the Holocaust. In addition to Jews, Christians, Germans, Poles, Canadians, and, by implication, others not mentioned here have much to learn from that most terrible of events. The particular significance to each group is a component of the universal significance of the Holocaust. And the insights of the various academic disciplines, theology, history, psychology, and others, are necessary for whatever understanding of the whole that we can achieve. Let me conclude with a straightforward question that underlies all the others. It is a question that came to me at Treblinka, unexpectedly, despite all the study I have done. Treblinka was a murder camp specifically for the Jews of Warsaw and other nearby places. Jews were marched directly from the trains to the gas chambers; only a handful survived. The camp operated for two years; then it was razed, its job done. Visitors are shown the probable locations of the gas chamber and a plan of the camp. The guide points out, not without emotion, that when the bodies were removed from the gas chambers, they were burnt on a giant open-pit barbecue, a reconstruction of which stands for pilgrims to contemplate. For two years, Jewish bodies were barbecued in the open air, the sight not hidden from those who worked in the camp nor the smell from those who lived in the vicinity. I know that human beings are capable of great evil. But how could any human being do that?

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