Michael Wyschogrod

Dr. Michael Wyschogrod is Chairman of the Department of Philosophy of Baruch College and a member of TRADITION'S Editorial Board. In this essay he offers a critique of the views of Dr. Irving Greenberg on the role of The Holocaust in Jewish Theology.

AUSCHWITZ: BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA?
REFLECTIONS ON THE HOLOCAUST

In recent years there have been few Jewish—particularly Orthodox—theologians who have made the holocaust as central in their thinking as has Irving Greenberg. And until now it has been difficult to gather a fairly complete picture of his thinking on the subject. Much of it was delivered in lectures and discussions from which no firm text resulted. This situation has now changed. In Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust,* Greenberg contributes “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust,” a 48 page, detailed exposition of his views. This paper was delivered at a 1973 symposium on the holocaust held at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. Both the original symposium and the volume that resulted from it have attracted some attention. Nevertheless, Greenberg’s paper which is the first piece in the volume and by far the longest has not received the careful attention it deserves. While the theological issues raised by the holocaust are naturally of concern to all branches of Judaism, they represent a particularly serious set of problems for the Orthodox theologian whose freedom to make fundamental revisions in the tradition far more limited than is the case with his non-Orthodox colleagues. It is for this reason that Greenberg’s views must be subjected to rigorous examination.

Greenberg begins with a profoundly true diagnosis: “Both Judaism and Christianity are religions of redemption.” Judaism

*Published by Ktav, 1977 and edited by Eva Fleischner.
teaches that God is in control of history and that it is His plan to redeem Israel and mankind. The central prayer text of rabbinic Judaism, the Eighteen Benedictions, speaks of little else but the forms of redemption. God is the “shield of Abraham,” He “resurrects the dead,” “bestows knowledge,” “heals the sick,” “rebuilds Jerusalem” and so on. The Eighteen Benedictions are in fact a good definition of the rabbinic understanding of redemption. Greenberg sees very clearly that the basic message of Judaism is the good news that the God of Israel is a redeeming God.

The holocaust, of course, clashes head-on with this contention. While six million Jewish men, women and children were being murdered, God was silent and did not redeem. At this point there are two options available to the Jewish theologian. He can conclude, as Richard Rubenstein did, that the message of the God of Israel as a redeeming God can no longer be preached. Judaism is, after all, a historical religion and not an abstract philosophy. If it is historic events, particularly the Exodus, which are the foundations of Israel’s faith, then further historic events must be able to undermine that faith and the holocaust, in Rubenstein’s view, was eminently qualified to do so. The other option is to pretend that nothing has happened. The holocaust was not the first destructive event in Jewish history. In spite of the many destructive events that Jews have experienced, it can be argued, the Jewish faith in God as the redeemer has persisted and should persist even after the holocaust.

Greenberg refuses to accept either one of these options. He will not accept the Rubenstein option because he believes that the atheistic option leads to the deification of man and the removal of all constraints which are precisely the developments that made the holocaust possible. But he also refuses to accept the “Orthodox” view because it does not recognize the holocaust as an “orienting event.” Speaking of both Judaism and Christianity, Greenberg writes: “Failure to confront and account for this evil, then, would turn both religions into empty, Pollyanna assertions, credible only because believers ignore the realities of human history.” Greenberg’s greatest anger is reserved for those “Jews who have sought to assimilate the Holocaust to cer-
Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust

tain unreconstructed traditional categories, to explain destruction as a visitation for evil." These "betray and mock the agony of the victims," they perform "the devil's work," are "satanic" and "turn faithfulness into demonism." In short, both the atheistic and "Orthodox" responses are unacceptable since "to use the catastrophe to uphold the univocal validity of any category is to turn it into grist for propaganda mills." The holocaust is incompatible with and has therefore undermined all world views, none of which retains any credibility, because Greenberg lays down the working principle that "no statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children." Since this sentence is followed by 32 more pages of discussion it is safe to assume that Greenberg believes that what he has to say in those 32 pages remains "credible in the presence of the burning children." But what is Greenberg's position and by what merits is it able to pass this supreme test?

The answer is "dialectical theology." While everything else fails, it succeeds. "The Holocaust," he writes, "offers us only dialectical moves and understandings—often moves that stretch our capacity to the limit and torment us with their irresolvable tensions." Stated plainly, dialectical living consists of holding opposite truths simultaneously and being torn apart in the process of so doing. The closest Greenberg comes to defining his notion of the dialectical is to refer to a novel of Wiesel which tells of a Jewish prostitute named Sarah who began her career in the camps to satisfy German soldiers. After the war, she offers herself to a shy survivor boy without money. "You are a saint," he says. "You are mad," she shrieks. Wiesel concludes: "Whoever listens to Sarah and doesn't change, whoever enters Sarah's world and doesn't invent new gods and new religions, deserves death and destruction. Sarah alone has the right to decide what is good and what is evil, the right to differentiate between what is true and what usurps the appearance of truth." Greenberg explains that "Sarah's life of prostitution, religiously and morally negative in classic terms, undergoes a moral reversal of category. It is suffering sainthood in the context of her life and her ongoing
response to the Holocaust experience. Yet this scene grants us no easy Sabbatianism, in which every act that can wrap itself in the garment of the Holocaust is justified and the old categories are no longer valid. The ultimate tension of the dialectic is maintained, and the moral disgust which Sarah's life inspires in her (and Wiesel? and us?) is not omitted either. The more we analyze the passage the more it throws us from pole to pole in ceaseless tension.” Dialectical theology, as Greenberg understands it, is therefore tension generated by two opposing truths neither of which can be discarded. The result is that “there is no peace or surcease and no lightly grasped guide to action in this world.” While Greenberg does not say so, it is quite clear to me that dialectical living, as understood by him, is descent into madness. If we were to continue to believe two weighty contradictory truths without making any effort to distinguish senses in which each is true and thereby to resolve the contradiction, we could not remain sane for long. If we are dealing with truths of life rather than of pure theory, we will find ourselves engaging in contradictory actions since theory and practice in the case of important truths are related. We will then have to destroy what we build, undo what we do, hate what we love and kill that to which we give life. Dialectical living is thus, as Greenberg points out, not a license to sin but a license to sin while moaning with guilt. If it is dialectical thinking and living that the Holocaust dictates then it dictates obligatory madness. Perhaps the Holocaust does dictate madness. But Greenberg is not mad. He just does not understand his own notion of dialectical thinking.

While the term “dialectical theology” has been applied in this century to the work of Karl Barth, he has rejected it as inapplicable to a theology based on God’s free and gracious act of communion with man. The term “dialectical” is, of course, properly applied to the thought of Hegel. Here it is an integral part of an evolutionary metaphysics in which the clash of opposites energizes the system but in which the oppositions in question do not remain in perpetual conflict but are transformed into higher unities which ultimately are absorbed into the undifferentiated oneness of the Absolute. It was against this grandiose synthesis of reason that Kierkegaard hurled his momentous chal-
Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust

The human being cannot escape choice. Perhaps from God's point of view all opposites will be resolved and there is a final synthesis. But that is not true of the human condition. As beings who are finite, we are faced with choices and we cannot evade the need to choose either by Hegelian fantasies or by a permanent state of maximum tension in which opposites are evenly balanced while the individual presides over his psychological demise. Such a stance is either totally self-destructive or disingenuous and therefore unacceptable in either of its modes.

Greenberg’s dialectical theology is then not a third option in addition to the atheistic conclusion of Rubenstein and the continuing faith of the believers. He realizes that he must face the question of faith. Can one have faith in a redeeming God after Auschwitz? He does not say one can nor does he say one cannot. Instead, he turns to time for a solution. After Auschwitz only “moments of faith” are possible. “We now have to speak of ‘moments of faith,’ moments when Redeemer and vision of redemption are present, interspersed with times when the flames and smoke of the burning children blot out faith—though it flickers again.” As a description of a psychological state, this diagnosis is quite plausible. We all have questions with respect to which we cannot make up our minds. In some instances this expresses itself in a fairly even level of agnosticism. When faced with a problem where the evidence is more or less equally balanced, we find ourselves in a state of doubt. Or, somewhat less evenly, we might vacillate from one belief to the other, believing one thing at one time and another at another time. But surely such vacillation is not a theological position. It is a report of a state of mind but not of a position held. A person who is in doubt about a matter or who vacillates from one belief to its opposite must concede that the truth cannot be in doubt or vacillated. The truth is what it is; doubt or vacillation are subjective states to which we are all entitled but which is not a third position in addition to the yes and no stances. If the Rubenstein position is false then things are not improved by holding Rubenstein’s position on a part-time basis and if the position of faith
is false then it, too, is not improved by reduction to part-time status. The person who is part-time Rubenstein and part-time believer manages to acquire the difficulties of both positions and the advantages of neither.

In fact, of course, Irving Greenberg is not a part-time believer and a part-time doubter. He does not observe every second Sabbath. He does not provide half of his children with a Jewish education while denying it to the other half. He does not observe the laws of kashrut on even days and disobey them on odd days. In fact, one of the points on which he insists most is that a person should be judged by his actions and not his spoken beliefs. "Thus, the atheist," he writes, "who consistently shows reverence for the image of God, but denies that he does so because he is a believer in God, is revealed by the flames to be one of the thirty-six righteous—the hidden righteous, whom Jewish tradition asserts to be the most righteous, those for whose sake the world exists." By these standards, what are we to say of a Jew who observes every Sabbath, gives all his children a Jewish education, observes the laws of kashrut at all times and consistently recites the prayers in the prayer book and then tells us that he has only moments of faith? We are entitled to say to him, as I make bold to say to Irving Greenberg now, that his faith is more than momentary and that he is a better theologian in life than in word. We must thank God that, in fact, the holocaust has not destroyed his faith. In spite of all his fulminations against those whose faith has remained intact after Auschwitz, the truth is that every time a Jew encounters the holocaust and loses his faith, the holocaust has claimed one more Jewish victim and every time a Jew encounters the holocaust—he must encounter it, otherwise he does not belong to the nation—and continues to bless God who is the "shield of Abraham," "heals the sick," "resurrects the dead" and "rebuilds Jerusalem" he defeats Hitler and carries out the legacy of the dead. Those who perished at the hands of the Nazi murderers did not wish the demise of Judaism. They did not wish for us to obliterate Jewish prayer by refusing to speak of God as the redeemer of Israel. They wished the service in the synagogue to continue, the ancient words to be recited as they had recited them and as they had heard their
Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust

loved ones recite them. There is no need to fulminate against those who continue to do so, in spite of all the questions to which we have no answers.

Jewish faith means this: to believe that God will fulfill His promises even though the evidence seems to suggest that He will not do so. The first mention of faith occurs in Gen. 15:6: “Abram put his faith in the Lord and the Lord counted this faith to him as righteousness.” This statement occurs immediately after Abraham’s complaint (v. 3) “Thou hast given me no children and so my heir must be a slave born in my house.” God’s reply to Abraham’s complaint is simple (v. 5): “He took Abraham outside and said, ‘Look up into the sky, and count the stars if you can. So many,’ He said, ‘shall your descendants be.’” Earlier (13:16), God had promised “I will make your descendants countless as the dust of the earth; if anyone could count the dust upon the ground, then he could count your descendants.” And then God permitted old age to creep over Abraham and Sarah and they did not have one child. When Abraham complains, God repeats the promise, changing the metaphor from the dust of the earth to the stars of the heaven. God reiterates His promise to Abraham as if He were saying: “Trust in me, if I have promised it, it will happen, though you cannot see how I could possibly bring it about.” It is at this point that we are told (15:6) of Abraham’s faith which God counted as righteousness. Faith here clearly means to believe that God will fulfill his promise though no human being can see how He can do it. And that same faith of Abraham is demonstrated when, after miraculously giving a child to Abraham and Sarah in their old age, God commands Abraham to sacrifice this miraculously conceived child. Surely Abraham must have asked himself how God could keep His promise if he were to sacrifice Isaac. But Abraham trusts God and believes He will fulfill His promise even if Isaac is killed. Jewish faith is therefore from its inception belief that God can do what is humanly inconceivable. In our age, this involves believing that God will fulfill His promise to redeem Israel and the world in spite of Auschwitz. Can I understand how this is possible? I cannot. And I especially cannot understand
how God can ever make it up to those who perished in the holo-
cast. But with Abraham, I believe that He will do so. Is this
an obscene belief? Does it make light of the suffering of the
murdered? In a way, I suppose, it does, certainly from the human
point of view. But God can and will do it. He is not bound by
what is humanly possible. He has promised to redeem us and He
will do so.

For countless centuries Jews have blessed God “who heals the
sick of his people Israel.” They have recited this blessing after
coming home from the burial of a loved one, one of the sick
of the people of Israel whom He did not heal. For centuries
Jews have blessed God who “builds Jerusalem.” And Jerusalem
was not being built. It was desolate, the domicile of jackals.
The clear evidence of the eyes was that God was not building
Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Jews recited the blessing because God
had promised to build Jerusalem and if He had promised, then
it was as good as money in the bank. (I once used this metaphor
with Karl Barth when he said to me that Jews have only the
promise while Christians have the promise and the fulfillment.
Overcome by the banking atmosphere of Basle, where the con-
versation took place, I replied: “Professor Barth, with a human
being it is one thing to have his promise, another the fulfillment.
He may die before he is able to carry it out. Or he may change
his mind. Or he may be unable to do so. But with God it is
different. When He promises something, it is like money in the
bank. Therefore, if Jews have the promise, we have the fulfill-
ment and if we do not have the fulfillment, we do not have the
promise.” He thought for a while and replied: “You know, I
have never thought of it that way.”) If human eyes did not see
Jerusalem being rebuilt, then this only demonstrated the limits
of human vision, not the non-reliability of God’s promises. God
heals the sick of Israel and if someone I love has just died, then
God still heals the sick of Israel. Perhaps in some other sense
than the one I had in mind. Perhaps at another time. Or perhaps
I just don’t know how. But God heals the sick of Israel.

It therefore follows that the position of faith has always been
an obscenity. Faith has always clung to a trust that was not war-
ranted by the standards of plausibility and the givens of the
observable world. Perhaps Irving Greenberg would find it obscene to visit a child dying of cancer and to tell him and his family that God is watching over him and that nothing bad can happen to him because God is with him. But should this message be withheld from the child and his family if one believes it to be true? One who delivers such a message does not offer his own wisdom or discovery. He repeats the promise that God and not he has delivered. It is true that there is a period of intense mourning when the dead has not yet been buried, when it is forbidden to comfort the mourner. But that is a very brief period and perhaps that is why Jewish law demands the burial of the dead as soon as possible. Once the dead is buried the mourner is obligated to recite the Eighteen Benedictions with its proclamation of the redeeming God.

But we must not get carried away with ourselves. Greenberg does not simply deny the standpoint of faith. “Faith,” he writes, “is a moment of truth, but there are moments when it is not true. This is certainly demonstrable in dialectical truths, when invoking the truth at the wrong moment is a lie.” He continues: “Tell the children in the pits they are burning for their sins. An honest man—better, a decent man—would spit at such a God rather than accept this rationale if it were true. If this justification is loyalty, then surely treason is the honorable choice. If this were the only choice, then surely God would prefer atheism.”

But we must not stop thinking, in spite of the intensity of Greenberg’s emotion. There are some truths which are true at one time and not at another. The statement that someone is in a certain city may be true at one hour and false at another. But the statement that the Jews who died in the holocaust did so because of their sins is either true or false. Greenberg is prepared to spit at God if it is true. But is there any other explanation—except, perhaps, the powerlessness of God which he does not mention—that would not cause him to spit at God? The statement that God will redeem the suffering of the holocaust is either true or false. It cannot be true at one time and false at another. There may be a time when it is psychologically inappropriate to remind someone of a truth. But even if this is so,
it does not thereby cease to be true. One does not speak, the proverb says, of rope in a hung man’s house. It nevertheless remains true that the hung man was hung. The position of faith is therefore either true or false. Greenberg cannot duck this choice. He can, of course, say that he does not know whether it is true or false. But he cannot say, what he attempts to say, that it is true sometimes and false at other times. The God of Israel either exists or He does not exist. He does not exist some of the time and not exist at other times. At times the evidence may be overwhelming that he does exist, at other times that he does not. But that is a variation in the evidence and not in the existence of God. Psychologically, Greenberg’s position is understandable. He is furious at God for the holocaust and he is a believing Jew. Both of these matter a great deal to him. He is unprepared to give up either of these deeply held commitments. He therefore invents the idea of dialectical theology which he imagines will permit him to maintain contradictory commitments. But the word “dialectical” does not make possible what is intellectually impossible.

There is one other factor that is significant: the influence of Eli Wiesel. Wiesel, in fact, is intellectually very much in the same situation as Greenberg. But he has one advantage over Greenberg: as a writer of fiction rather than a theologian, he is under no obligation to arrive at a position. It is sufficient for him to depict the spiritual and psychological turmoil of his characters. Greenberg, on the other hand, attempts to weave Wiesel’s fiction into an intellectually defensive position without grasping the difference between literature and theology. The fact that Greenberg cites Wiesel’s story of the prostitute who is a holocaust victim in defining his notion of the dialectical reveals the origin of his ideas. While from time to time Wiesel flirts with theology, he is clear-minded enough to let his stories speak for themselves without additional explanations from him. It may be that Greenberg would also not be comfortable at being classified as a theologian of the holocaust. But since he does not satisfy himself with telling the story of the holocaust but attempts to assess its significance for the current religious situation, a number of conceptual criteria are applicable to him which are not applicable.
Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust

to Wiesel.

We now come to the most serious theological error in Greenberg's essay: the claim that the holocaust was a revelational event. Greenberg is, of course, aware that this is a dangerous claim that is bound to meet resistance. He therefore inserts a section in his essay in which he discusses "Resistance to New Revelation: Jewish and Christian." For traditional Jews," he writes, "to ignore or deny all significance to this event would be to repudiate the fundamental belief and affirmations of the Sinai covenant: that history is meaningful, and that ultimate liberation and relationship to God will take place in the realm of human events. Exodus-Sinai would be insulated from all contradictory events—at the cost of removing it from the realm of the real—the realm on which it stakes its all—the realm of its origin and testimony." The options that Greenberg presents are therefore two: either consider the holocaust a revelational event or abdicate the realm of the historical as of no interest to Judaism. What Greenberg does not seem to realize is that it is not necessary to be impaled on the horns of this dilemma because there are other alternatives to the two he suggests. But in order to understand what the genuine alternatives are, one has to understand what revelation is and it is here that Greenberg's thinking seems exceptionally uninflected.

In revelation God communicates to man a message that he wishes man to have. Other than at Sinai where God directly addressed the people, God's messages are delivered by the prophets of Israel. In fact, the Hebrew word *navie* which is usually translated "prophet" should more correctly be rendered "spokesman." This is clear from Exodus 7:1 where, after Moses had complained that he cannot demand of Pharaoh the liberation of the Jewish people because he is a man of defective speech, God replies: "See, I have set thee in God's stead to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy spokesman (*neviékha)*." The spokesmen of God, otherwise known as the prophets, deliver the messages that God wants man to have. Sometimes these messages concern God's desire for human conduct, those actions which God wants man to do and those he does not. At other
times, the messages deal with the interpretation of events. God explains why a certain event happened or what will happen if Israel does not change its ways. In all of these instances, the event alone is never revelation. It is the accompanying word of God which explains the meaning of the event that turns it into revelation. *Events themselves are always ambiguous, lending themselves to a great variety of interpretations.* The splitting of the Red Sea and the resulting catastrophe to the hosts of Egypt was then and can now be explained in many different ways. Many of these explanations have nothing to do with the power of God and his covenant with Abraham but with the socio-political realities of the ancient world and the winds and tides of the ocean. We know that at the Red Sea it was God who saved Israel because of the divine word which says so. Otherwise we would be in the dark, dealing with competing hypotheses of varying degrees of probability. It therefore follows that it is not possible to speak of “revelational events” as such. There can be no revelation when there is no prophecy, when the word of God is not heard and when it is, it is the hearing of the word of God that is revelation and not the event itself unaccompanied by the word of God. This does not, of course, exclude feeling the finger of God in the events of one’s life. If I have a reservation for a flight which I miss and which crashes on take-off killing all aboard, I may experience this as divine salvation. But this cannot be called revelation in the sense in which the faith of Israel looks to the Exodus and Sinai as the revelational events validated by the word of God. Was the Entebbe raid an act of divine intervention or a brilliantly executed human undertaking accompanied by a very large measure of luck? We may all have our *opinions* about this question but we can have no certainty about it because the messengers of God are no longer heard among us. We know they will be heard again and then we will know. But not otherwise.

It is therefore beyond anyone’s competence under the current set of circumstances to declare the holocaust or any other event—including the establishment of the state of Israel—a revelational event. But that is only part—though a very significant part—of the problem. *Revelational acts are saving acts.* The
great events on which the faith of Israel is founded are divine acts of salvation: the election of Abraham, the Exodus, the conquest of the land, etc. These events, interpreted by the word of God, establish God as a redeeming God and constitute the foundation of Israel’s faith in the coming redemption. As God has redeemed us in the past, so will he redeem us in the future. There is a kind of primitive induction at work here except that it is an induction which ignores contrary instances. God’s acts of anger do not enter into the induction. They are not denied nor are they ignored. The Bible records them with great care and attention. But they are never equated with God’s saving acts. Fundamentally, God is a redeemer. His anger is fleeting. Once it passes, His love which had never gone out of existence but only out of sight reasserts itself and the reality of redemption returns. The festivals of Israel which celebrate the revelational events that are at the foundation of Judaism do not deal with God’s destructive acts but his saving acts. There are rabbinically enacted days of mourning which remember non-saving acts in Jewish history. But these cannot be equated with the festivals nor with the Sabbath which celebrates the first saving act of God, the creation of the world. The Fast Day of the 9th of Av is not one of the pillars of Judaism. But Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot and the Sabbath are such pillars because they teach that the God of Israel is a saving God.

Putting aside the absence of prophecy, what would the holocaust as a revelational event reveal? That God is evil? That He does not care about what happens to His people? That He punishes His people when they disobey Him? This last message Greenberg has already said he finds intolerable and wishes not to hear. What else could the holocaust reveal? Nothing. If the holocaust were a revelational event, it would reveal the power of the devil over God and that is not a revelation I wish to hear. And here we come to the crux of the matter. Inserted at the heart of Judaism as a revelational event comparable to Sinai, the holocaust will necessarily destroy Judaism and give Hitler the posthumous victory we all wish to deny him. Greenberg thinks he can play with “moments of faith” and keep Judaism intact. We
have already seen that his Judaism remains intact only because he does not carry out his “moments of faith” theology but, instead, on the level of action, remains a full-time observant Jew. Were he more consistent, the destructive potential of his theology would become fully apparent. While his lack of consistency is here a virtue, it must not cause us to overlook the profound deficiency of his theology. The holocaust has no place in the inner sanctum of Judaism. It is not an event of revelation. It stands on the sidelines and mocks the true revelations of Judaism. In speaking of its perpetrators, the Jewish folk spirit applies the expletive yemah shemam (may their names be obliterated). The Jewish hope is that those who perpetrated the holocaust not be remembered. With revelational events the opposite is the hope so that everything is done to remember and reenact them. The ultimate triumph over the perpetrators of the holocaust is their disappearance from the memory of the Jewish people. Pre-messianically, this is of course, impossible. The holocaust must be remembered as is the destruction of the Temple. But no one considers the destruction of the Temple a revelational event and no one should so consider the holocaust.

There is finally the question of what lessons are to be drawn from the holocaust. This is intertwined with the question of what the holocaust, as revelation, reveals. We have seen that, as far as can be made out, the revelation of the holocaust is that only moments of faith are possible which is the actual message of Greenberg’s dialectical theology. But the holocaust also teaches Greenberg a lesson: “The lesson of Auschwitz is that no human being should lack a guaranteed place to flee again, just as the lesson of the Exodus was that no runaway slave should be turned back to his master (Deut. 23:16).” Elsewhere, he phrases this point thus: “Out of the Holocaust experience comes the demand for redistribution of power. The principle is simple. No one should ever have to depend again on anyone else’s good will or respect for their basic security and right to exist.” By saying this, Greenberg aligns himself with the poor and the underprivileged of the world who are demanding the redistribution of power Greenberg alludes to. Dialectical holocaust theology thus concludes with a deeply moral conclusion and therefore, to some
Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust

degree at least, not everything has been in vain. Properly interpreted, the holocaust will lead to a better world for all. Whether Greenberg considers these lessons parts of the revelation of the holocaust is hard to say. But that there are lessons to be learned from the holocaust is perfectly clear.

I cannot agree that there are any sane lessons to be drawn from the holocaust. The holocaust was such an event of total evil that only insane lessons can be drawn from it. One such possibility is suicidal pacifism. The violence of the holocaust can generate a totally undifferentiated horror at violence such as to leave the victim vulnerable to easy destruction by anyone less inhibited. Or, conversely, the holocaust can destroy all moral inhibitions by demonstrating the impotence of morality in the face of total evil. The truth is that both of these conclusions are implied by the holocaust and that they are both deeply insane and destructive conclusions. Most of us, being sane, are neither pacifists nor without moral inhibitions altogether. We believe that violence is justified under certain circumstances and unjustified under others. The very sanity of this view marks it as not born of the holocaust. If fully encountered, the holocaust must drive us insane. When Greenberg speaks of a "redistribution of power," he means this either as a sane or as an insane policy. As a sane policy, it amounts to a reduction in the relative disparities in power by a series of small and tentative steps but by no means the abolition of all inequalities of power. Read more seriously, it is a prescription for maximum violence on the part of those without power. Since disparities in power will continue to exist, the Greenberg program could imply a doctrine of permanent revolution doomed to permanent failure. It is impossible for human beings to coexist if no one can ever depend for his security on anyone else. Instead of buying guns, I depend on the police for my security. Is Greenberg arguing that I should not do so? Perhaps I ought not to trust the police. Perhaps, at the moment of need, they will turn against me and those I love. If this is what Greenberg is saying as a result of his analysis of the holocaust, I could not blame him for it. Nor could I blame him if he undertook to deprive policemen of their guns, having been made sick
by the very sight of guns. In short, I could not blame Greenberg if the holocaust drove him out of his mind. In fact, I am more than a little ashamed that the holocaust has not driven me out of my mind. The fact is that neither Greenberg nor I is insane and, in the final analysis, this is as it should be.

Recently, I attended the wedding of the daughter of a Warsaw Ghetto survivor to the son of another survivor. The blessings spoke of the creation of man in the image of God, of the joy of the childless woman whom God has made fertile and whose sons are gathered about her and of the joyous sounds of grooms and brides in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. There was great joy at that wedding. There was, of course, also the sense of absence of all those who should have been there but were not. They were not forgotten by any means. But the redeeming God of Israel was also not forgotten. If, after the holocaust, we have children who, in turn, beget children, if we can smile and laugh at jokes and satisfy our normal human appetites, if, in short, we have not gone mad, it is because we trust in the God of our fathers. He will reward those who have perished and punish those who committed the evil. He watches over this nation even when it does not seem so. We believe this fairly steadily and not only for moments.