

FOREWORD BY IRVING GREENBERG

In rereading *Long Night's Journey Into Day* for this foreword, one surprising word forces itself into consciousness: prophets. What constitutes a prophet? The ability to excoriate God's people for the sake of God, out of overflowing love and the desire that one's family be morally healed; the ability to challenge God for the sake of God's people and to demand better divine behavior out of passionate covenantal attachment; without fear or guile to shed a light of analysis so pure and decisive that the inexorable recognition comes: one is standing in the circle of illumination of the divine light itself, and there is no hiding. These qualities describe the achievement of Alice and Roy Eckardt in this book; prophet is as prophet does.

Of course, the fire of prophecy is so searing, so merciless in its integrity, so revealing in its compassion that we—as our predecessors—are far more likely to writhe in agony at our moral nakedness, to offer a hundred exculpations, to do everything to trivialize or, better, to evade reading the words! Thus, we cling to death, moral and spiritual, rather than release our idolatries, purge ourselves, and turn to life reborn. All too often, this response has been the fate of Alice and Roy Eckardt and of *Long Night's Journey*. This new edition offers us another chance to do better.

At the heart of this book's power is its unrelenting grasp of the truth that the Holocaust is an orienting event, "an event that twists our journey through space/time by 180 degrees" (p. 54). By the light this event sheds, the Eckardts take elements of Christian and Jewish theology, of the German people and various of its leaders, of scholars and individual theologies such as Jürgen Moltmann's and Wolfhart Pannenberg's—and yes, even of our understanding of God and covenant—and pass them under the rod and count and sift and fix their lifespan and write their destiny. The results are sometimes inspiring and sometimes devastating but always stimulating and thought provoking.

With all its intensity and weight, the book is written with wit, imagination, and even flair; sometimes all these elements are rolled into one. Witness the Eckardts' stunning articulation of the reality of the devil and unmasking of the diabolic strategies, their exposition of the unique uniqueness of the Holocaust, their proposal to redate the calendar B.F.S. (Before the Final Solution) and F.S. (in the year of the Final Solution).

Despite its capacity to upset our certainties and comfortable positions, this is a liberating and even ennobling book. It summons God to necessary penitence for having made Israel a suffering servant through divine election; simultaneously it calls humans to forgive and to open up "[to] the possibility of a trust in God in a dimension beyond but fulfilling history" (p. 90). The Eckardts are trying to evoke the best in our nature, giving us the courage to take responsibility—to use our freedom to self-correct. They guide us to restore the moral health of culture and religion, especially Christianity; we desperately need to heal the body of faith after the uncovering of the putrid, morally dead flesh that made the Holocaust possible.

Long Night's Journey is a model of integrity—for some, painful integrity—in both its capacity to pass judgment without evasion and its willingness to pay the price and understand Christianity in a new light in order to purge the incubus of hatred from the gospel of love. Many Christians bridle at its critique of the claim that the crucifixion be accepted as the determinative symbol of redemptive suffering. Speaking as a Jew, as an outsider, to my Christian brothers and sisters, I can only assure you that this is not a dismissal of Christianity but a call to modesty of theological claims and to deeper insight into the message of the cross. By the x-rays of the Holocaust, the Eckardts see more deeply; they see the event of Golgotha not as theological triumph but as a cry to humans to join in God's work of overcoming suffering and remove others from the cross.

The most difficult section for Christian readers is the Eckardts' reduction of the resurrection. (Let it be said, that this is no more difficult to integrate in a faithful Christian's *Weltanschauung* than it is for faithful Jews to confront the Eckardts' challenge to humanity and to admit that the covenant of demands on Jews is no longer morally valid and that only the Jews can restore it by reaccepting it voluntarily.) I plead with Christians: Listen carefully; certainly, do not dismiss the Eckardts as Christians. Christian faith should be exposed to their insight even if ultimately their position is not accepted. If faith be deepened by

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this encounter or if the insight be integrated into belief, then the Christian faith is enriched, as the Eckardts wish. If faith be wounded in the process, let it be recognized that, after the Holocaust, no faith is so whole as a broken faith. (Is this not the deeper message of Jesus' final words on the cross?) The bruises inflicted by the Eckardts are the faithful wounds of a friend/lover; they are closer to the Christian truth than the widely accepted imperialist claims of a triumphant Resurrection by which Christian superiority over Judaism—and all civilization—supposedly is “[unequivocally] confirmed by the God of Israel himself” (Pannenberg).

Ultimately, the lifelong mission of the Eckardts and this extraordinary book tower above all the arguments. They help tilt the balance of the world toward redemption. After all is said and done, *Long Night's Journey Into Day* summons all its readers—Christians and Jews and unbelievers alike—to believe in and work for that yet unrealized final and universal resurrection. This book and the Eckardts, by their life-work, bring us closer to that longed for day.

FOREWORD BY FRANKLIN H. LITTELL

Roy Eckardt and I were active in the Epworth League and the National Council of Methodist Youth fifty years ago, and we have been friends, fellow seminarians and Methodist ministers, professors and professional colleagues since that time. How long ago it was—before World War II, before the Holocaust!

In the towers of theological training and in the bastions of ecclesiastical bureaucracy there are still many who show no signs of historical awareness. They continue to draw their supplies through a long tunnel, as has the traditional Christian apologetic for centuries, without regard to the weather outside. Ignoring the heat and cold, the fear and fortune, the starvation and mass death which are the lot of ordinary mortals, in intellectual conclave they have hunkered down and continued to debate timeless questions and profess timeless truths.

Roy Eckardt was formed in another school of thought. He has followed at this point the line of our great teacher Reinhold Niebuhr, to whom theology was a matter of confession with the life as well as with the lips, for whom the truth became clearer in the arena than it could ever be on the balcony. Since Roy Eckardt published his first great book on the Christian/Jewish encounter, *Christianity and the Children of Israel* (1948), he has relentlessly pursued the most difficult and the most painful of Christian theological burdens today: to rethink, rework, and reconstruct Christian preaching and teaching about the survival of the Jewish people.

In this work he has been accompanied and assisted by his wife, Alice, who, as their children grew up, entered more and more into the theological arena in her own right. In 1970 there appeared the first major expression of their literary partnership: *Encounter with Israel: A Challenge to Conscience*. The central theme is significant, for the restored state of Israel presents a major pledge of Jewish survival.

The Holocaust, in which 60 percent of European Jewry was slaughtered in the heart of "Christendom" (one out of every three Jews in the

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world), seemed to many an extreme reading of Christian apologetic. Yet there was no getting around the fact that the churches had for centuries proclaimed that with the coming of Jesus Christ the Jewish historical mission was fulfilled and the Jews should disappear into the limbo of history. That they did not disappear was an offense to traditional Christian apologetic. That they survived the Nazi "final solution" was a miracle, especially considering the technological power mustered against them when powerless and abandoned by the so-called Christian nations.

There is no *quid pro quo* in the relationship of the Holocaust to a restored Israel. But one question brackets the two themes, a question that today puts Christianity to the question: "*How do you interpret the survival of the Jewish people?*"

Traditional Christian apologetic, having given the wrong answer for centuries, now ignores the question. The so-called Historical Revisionists, who simply deny that there ever was a Holocaust, are now generally viewed with contempt by decent people as well as amusement by trained historians. The theological denial is hardly so brash, but its effects are more pernicious to date. Yet there is a new breed coming, and there are seminars and dissertations in theological faculties and seminaries in the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and West Germany that might be said to inaugurate a Christian reentry into history.

Roy and Alice Eckardt, having wrestled with the Angel of the Lord on this theme for decades, have earned the right to be called "blessed."

The present writing, already a classic, works through the problematic, challenges the traditional apologetic and its consequences, exposes the intellectual denials, and points the way that a reconstructed Christian preaching and teaching must go if Christian credibility is to be regained *post-Auschwitz*. Even where a colleague may differ with a given solution, no one can help but admire the precision with which the Eckardts identify the critical issues, the clarity with which they discuss the topics, and the vigor with which they challenge those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

No event has made more clear the consequences of ideas than the German Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish Problem.” There could have been no “Jewish problem” to resolve had not almost two millennia of Christian teaching and preaching created it. There could have been no bureaucracy of highly trained civil servants and professionals willing to initiate and carry out mechanized and systematic mass murder without the development over several centuries of a technological and scientific mindset that saw nothing wrong in using ruthless social engineering to create a national society from which all the human “problems” had been eliminated.

The ramifications of these ideas have neither been eliminated with the military defeat of the Third Reich, nor are they limited to that geographical locale. Dare we hope that they will be overcome, abolished? (Hope is not just optimism; genuine hope is chastened by sober realism.)

It appears that there are “key moments of history [when] possibilities for transformation emerge, which in turn create a new tradition. These moments are *kairoi*, times filled with the promise of the future and [perhaps even] expectation of new revelatory experience. At this juncture [people] can respond either by seeking to hold onto the past, out of anxiety about the new and untried future, or [they] can take the risk of the new.”¹ Although the last decades of the twentieth century hardly appear to qualify as times filled with the promise of the future, or expectation of new revelatory experience, we suggest that we do, in fact, live in such a key moment. The *Shoah* (Holocaust) itself must be seen as a revelatory experience, “a negative epiphany” as Emil Fackenheim has described it,² and as such it has much to reveal to us. The memory of the Holocaust must be a life-shaping force that makes us significantly more sensitive to individual suffering, to the frailty and preciousness of human life, to the fragile fabric of society, and to the insidious ways by which religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas can lead us to justify life-destroying behavior. We have the freedom to

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transform our faith, our attitudes, and our teachings so that they will *not* carry the genocidal impulse or the impulse to subordinate any group or class of people. We can learn to be more humble in our confessions. We can learn to recognize the danger signals of old ideas and new absolutisms that claim the right to determine who has the right to live.

To undertake this kind of revolutionary about-face (*metanoia*) requires knowledge of what was wrong in the past, and a genuine experience of repentance (*teshuvah*). It also calls for courage to walk forward into the unknown and to try the untried. Our title makes clear that much of the book entails what Robert McAfee Brown has described as

a nocturnal journey. Only fleetingly does day begin to dawn at the end. And that is as it should be. Any vision of dawn from such a night will turn out to be premature, a false dawn. Daylight here will not come automatically. . . . The psychic, even spiritual, daylight toward which [the Eckardt] book points can be had only by hard effort, painful confrontation, and the shedding of much intellectual and spiritual clothing we had thought would keep us warm in the night but actually was insulating us from the truth.³

The Third Reich waged a war against such traditional Jewish and Christian values as compassion, concern for the helpless and infirm, kindness, and ordinary humaneness; it built a state in which the forces of exclusiveness and hate and the idolatries of nation, race, and political creed garnered mass support. Tragically, many parts of the world have been overtaken by these very same sorts of forces, under banners other than Nazism. Most, or at least many, of these contemporary manifestations have different origins from that of the Nazis' antisemitism and racial doctrines, and for that reason they are outside the direct concerns of this study. That does not mean, however, that they may not have a similar etiology or that they should command less concern. Our endeavors are particularly committed to the eradication of all the strands of antisemitism—Christian, rationalist, political, and racial—and anti-Judaism that enabled the systematic murder of some six million Jewish children and adults to be carried out in the heart of Christian Europe.

The study and thinking that have emerged in this book in both its original and revised forms are the result of considerably more than a decade's consistent attention to the subject in response to teaching opportunities, the challenge and inspiration of friends and colleagues in both the Jewish and Christian communities, and the outpouring of

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scholarly work and personal accounts regarding the Holocaust and the years immediately preceding (and following) the killing phase of Hitler's Final Solution. Above all, our engagement has been an intrinsic part of our long struggle to resolve the contradiction of Christianity's proclamation of divine love and salvation (and supposed liberation) and the church's persisting *adversus Judaeos* tradition. This is, in fact, the main concern of the volume. Consequently there is considerable attention to theological thinking, especially by some Christians. However, much attention is given to Jewish thinkers as well (theology is not a word widely used in Jewish circles) since some of the troubling faith questions are similar, and because it is time for Christians to listen to Jews.

The initial opportunity to devote full time to research, international discussions, and writing was made possible by a humanities fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation. Our major research during much of that time was undertaken at the University of Tübingen,⁴ the Center of Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, and the Division of Holocaust Studies of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at The Hebrew University. Since then we have had the opportunity and pleasure of twice being visiting scholars at the Centre for Hebrew Studies, University of Oxford, where further work was undertaken and much of this revision prepared. Lehigh University has given us aid and support on all of these occasions, and we are pleased to be able to acknowledge it publicly. We have returned to Europe and Israel for additional research, and we have participated in a large number of national and international conferences on the Holocaust and on Christian-Jewish relations. We are members of a Christian study group that is seriously engaged in rethinking Christian theological positions that continue to have an impact on the Jewish people through attitudes implanted in clergy and church members. The study group came into being as a consequence of the awareness that hostility toward Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel still persisted in Christian circles some twenty-five years after the liberation of the death camps. To say that condition continues today is hardly necessary. However, the influx of new blood into this group of scholars as well as into other concerned circles is one factor that sustains hope.

In several European countries and Israel we conducted a number of oral history sessions with scholars, literary figures, psychiatrists, religious officials, and lay persons. In addition, inquiries were directed to respondents in different lands, within and outside the churches. In both

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[We] will never succeed in making the *churban*—the Jewish catastrophe of our time—understood to those who will live after us. . . . “Even if all the firmament were made of parchment, all the trees were pens, all the seas ink, and even if all the inhabitants of the earth were scribes, and they wrote day and night, they would never succeed . . .”

Manès Sperber, . . . *than a Tear in the Sea*

Had the Jew Jesus of Nazareth lived in the “right” time and “right” place, he would have been dispatched to a gas chamber. Many of the Nazi executions of Jews were carried out by believing Christians. When these two truths are put together, as, incredibly, they must be, the rationale of this book begins to express itself. We seek here to deal, in selected ways, with the contemporary impact and meaning of the Holocaust. Our approach is moral, philosophical, and theological.¹

Can the Holocaust event ever be explained? Perhaps it is not explainable. A few singular persons have brought that event to the fore. Were it not for the work of individuals such as Elie Wiesel, the Holocaust would occupy a much lesser place in today’s social conscience. Psychohistorically speaking, the passing of a full generation since the Nazi years has afforded a certain distancing that is important for scholars as a requisite to creative reflection and that has led a growing number of Christian and Jewish thinkers to grapple publicly with the subject. The concern of the Jewish community, generally considered, is quite transparent in its origins: the Holocaust is the most horrendous event in the long history of this people. Jewish thought and life have been shaken to the foundations. On the Christian side, from which the present writers speak, it is more and more acknowledged that what Jules Isaac called the “teaching of contempt” for Jews and Judaism

helped make the Holocaust possible and perhaps even inevitable.² If only for this reason, the Holocaust is as much a Christian event as a Jewish one.

The vastness of the subject of the Holocaust and its aftermath, its many impalpable elements and its severely controversial aspects make for a measure of pluralism and tentativeness within any effort to grapple with it. The pluralistic and provisional character of our understanding of the event is linked as well to the differing kinds of questions analysts raise. Insofar as these parties involve themselves in problems of causation and social conditioning, they will consult sociohistorical and psychohistorical sources. Others, concerned with questions of meaning and value, will turn to literary creations and to philosophic and theological materials. Yet the lines are always crossing, for the latter sources are inevitably influenced by given social milieus, just as the former sources are conditioned by existential and moral experience. This means that to set one type of approach qualitatively above the other is not convincing.

DIE ENDLÖSUNG

Uri Zvi Greenberg's accounting in the prose poem "To the Mound of Corpses in the Snow" is an epitome of our subject. An SS officer demands that the narrator's father, an old man, remove his clothes. Never before had the holy man stood entirely naked even before his own eyes. When the officer saw that his victim still persisted in wearing underclothes, socks, and skull-cap, the brute struck him, and he fell. "He gave a groan that was like the finishing of a last prayer, after which there is no more prayer, only a clouded sky, a heap of corpses, and a live officer." The blood from the saintly father's face turned the snow red. . . .³

Let us consider how the concept "Holocaust" is to be understood.⁴ We resort first to German phraseology for the sake of grappling, as though from inside Nazi demonry itself, with the eschatological and salvational nature of the *Judenvernichtung*, the total annihilation of Jews. The German Nazis determined upon *die Endlösung der Judenfrage* ("the Final Solution of the question of Jews"). This formulation was put forth officially on 20 January 1942 at a conference at Gross-Wannsee, although the actual decision was probably made earlier.⁵ The Wannsee dictum was the logical consummation of, or it merely gave

expression to, a resolve whose roots are traceable to 1919, when Adolf Hitler declared that his ultimate objective was "the removal of the Jews altogether." "Removal" became physical "extermination"—a term deliberately chosen for its association with verminous creatures—when such total elimination of Jews from existence was seen as the essential element in Hitler's apocalyptic struggle to create the new age of the master race.

According to the minutes of the Wannsee Conference, the eleven million Jews of all Europe were marked for death.⁶ Yet it is misleading to comprehend the Holocaust solely within the *Aktion* of simple killing.

The *Endlösung* means that everything is permitted now, any and every method is to be utilized in the struggle—indeed, in the enjoying of the struggle⁷—to obliterate the single pestilence that is destroying the entire world: the Jew. The German Nazis taught that the Jew is the *Untermensch*, the contaminator from below. The Jew is anti-human, *Gegenrasse*. Accordingly, his name is to be taken away; he does not deserve a name. He is only a number tattooed into his flesh.

The *Endlösung* is the competitive "race of the dead" at Treblinka and elsewhere, a physiological competition that makes one man's survival absolutely dependent upon the next man's extinction. For the race of death decreed which prisoners would be murdered and which ones "spared."

At the heart of the *Endlösung* is the utilization of Jews as officially selected agents for reviling and torturing their fellow Jews. The Jew is turned into the accomplice of his executioners. Thus, the *Endlösung* is ultimate degradation: the attempted dehumanization of the Jew as well as the torture process that makes this possible. The *Endlösung* is meant to be total mental, physical, and spiritual breakdown. It is the ontic separation of children and parents, wives and husbands. Child, parent, wife, husband—all these are enforced witnesses to the suffering and annihilation of their loved ones.

The chronology of what the Dutch psychiatrist Jan Bastiaans calls "das perfide System" was: Declare the Jew to be the *Untermensch* or *Gegenrasse*; then do everything to make him this, thereby vindicating your major premise; and only then, kill him. In this respect, the *Endlösung* had nothing to do with the specific advent of death, for the ultimate shamefulness lay in staying alive. Objectively speaking, death was transfigured into a form of mercy. Death became salvation—although, of course, the manner of death incarnated the dehumanization and was the mirror image of the terror. It is often said that the nightmares of the captives were more frightening than their encounter with death.

Speaking of life in the Vilna ghetto, Abba Kovner, who helped lead the uprising there, attests that the most appalling thing was not death, but to be defiled to the depths of one's soul every hour of the day.⁸ But perhaps the ultimate in attempted dehumanization was the German Nazi effort to obliterate the Jews and Jewishness from all human memory.

At the same time, we are not allowed to forget the complicity of those people and nations other than the persecutors themselves. There is much truth in Elie Wiesel's judgment that the victims suffered more "from the indifference of the onlookers than from the brutality of the executioner." Cynthia Haft writes that the futility of the agony is contained in the words "et ils savaient que vous ne pleureriez pas" (and they knew that you would not weep).⁹

Again, the *Endlösung* reached out even to those who gave the appearance of surviving it. Many could not endure the shock of "liberation." They died. For vast numbers of those who lived, the years after release were as dreadful as, or worse than, the horror of the camps. Most sadly, some no longer retained the strength that human beings are required to muster if they are to be happy.¹⁰ Thus, to be freed was, in many cases, not to be freed. How could these people adapt to a life that they had lost? Many lacked the power to retrieve their former world, a fight that would demand enormous inner resources. Even those with some strength left found that the old world was gone. Their loved ones and friends, their homes and their countries: all had been destroyed.

But the starkness of the horror of the *Endlösung* is not fully appreciated until its official character is realized: the Final Solution was the official action of a great modern state.

Most of the Jews of Europe were simply trapped people; there was nothing they could do to elude a certain fate. This must be insisted on especially because of the all-too frequent assertion that they went "like sheep to the slaughter." This accusation is one of the more demonic methods by which responsibility for the murders is insidiously transferred from the killers to the victims. Some Jews, of course, were led to collaborate with the enemy, under a variety of those impulses that capture any human being who, facing persecution and annihilation, seeks desperately to escape. Yet collaborationism was relatively rare. To be sure, in the days and hours before death many victims had been brought to that terrible state which allowed no psychic possibility save "consent" to destruction. (The quotation marks signify the truth that these persons were in fact beyond compliance or noncompliance.)