"Holding Oneself Open to Faith"

Emil Fackenheim's Evolving Views on Revelation

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Digest of Contents

This thesis contains a study of Emil L. Fackenheim's evolving views of revelation. The study begins with Fackenheim's thoughts on revelation as the basis of all religious belief, and then moves on to trace Fackenheim's thoughts on Revelation in Judaism in particular. The study is divided into three chronological sections that reflect the most significant changes in Fackenheim's thought.

The first section, from 1938 to 1966, covers Fackenheim's opposition to German Idealist Philosophy and his acceptance of the religious philosophies of Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber. It moves on to includes Fackenheim's unchanging definition of revelation, how revelation takes place, what qualifies as revelation, and the impact of revelation on humanity. The section then continues on to explain, in some detail, how Fackenheim understands Revelation in Judaism.

The second section, from 1967 to 1981, covers the changes in Fackenheim's thought regarding Revelation in Judaism, as he confronts the historical reality of the Holocaust and the Six Day War in Israel. This section includes Fackenheim's understanding of epoch-making-events, which challenge Jewish faith and the root-experiences on which the Jewish faith is based. Following this, the importance of the Midrash for Fackenheim is discussed. This section ends by examining Fackenheim's concept of the 614th Commandment.

In the final section of this thesis, which covers the period from 1982 until Fackenheim's death in 2003, we will see that Fackenheim turns his attention to the future of Judaism. This section explains what Fackenheim sees as a rupture between God and

post-Holocaust generations of Jews, and what will be required, in light of that rupture, to ensure the future of Judaism. Finally, this section includes a discussion of Fackenheim's view that, after the Holocaust, the modern State of Israel reconnects the Jewish people with the Jewish God of Revelation and may, thus, ensure the Jewish future.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Barry Kogan, who has guided me through this process. I am ever grateful for his patience, wisdom, and support.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Bruce, and my children, Eric and Brian. Their love and encouragement has made the last five years possible. They are truly the loves of my life.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the spring and summer of 1967 Jews around the world watched and listened intently as the events unfolded that led up to the Six Day War in Israel. Jews feared that the State of Israel would be destroyed. Memories and images of the Holocaust became hauntingly real, and Jews came together in solidarity to support Israel in any way possible. Jews living outside of Israel volunteered to fight along with Israeli soldiers, and those who could not go, gave generous amounts of money in support of Israel. When the war began, Israelis, many of whom were Holocaust survivors, fought against the large armies of their Arab neighbors with "superhuman" strength. Faced with what could have been another Holocaust in the Land to which they had finally returned, Israelis fought with a strength compounded by the memory of all they had lost just twenty years earlier. When Israeli forces pushed back and defeated the enemy armies and captured the city of Jerusalem in only six days, their victory took on a miraculous quality. Jews around the world felt proud to be Jews, and the State of Israel took on new significance.

In the years immediately following the Holocaust, as the atrocities that had taken place during the Holocaust were exposed, even prominent Jewish intellectuals were silent. Along with the rest of the world they were numbed by the pictures and stories that put a human face on the suffering of the victims. Beginning in the mid nineteen-sixties and especially after the Six Day War, the most important Jewish theologians, writers, and philosophers began to discuss the Holocaust openly in books and in public forums.

They tried to make sense of the Jewish God in light of the Holocaust and its aftermath. Emil Fackenheim was extraordinary qualified as an author and a speaker on this matter.

Fackenheim fled Nazi Germany in 1939, after spending three months in a Nazi concentration camp. He went on to become a prominent professor of philosophy and a world-renown scholar specializing in the philosophical and religious problems of the Holocaust. Fackenheim also became a Jewish theologian, a trained rabbi, and a community leader. He remained a committed Jew throughout his life. Fackenheim wrote eight book and well over one hundred articles in his effort to make sense of the Jewish God after the Holocaust.

Emil Fackenheim was only sixteen years old when Hitler came to power in 1933. He was still in high school in Halle, a city in the central eastern part of Germany. Fackenheim was born in Halle in 1916. Halle was an old industrial city of approximately two-hundred thousand people, situated about seventy miles from Berlin. A Jewish community had existed in Halle for a thousand years before Fackenheim was born. Fackenheim's father was a lawyer and his mother, a home-maker, was descended from a line of rabbis. He was the middle child of three brothers. Fackenheim grew up as a liberal Jew within a Judaism he later described as: "Conservative Judaism—but with an organ."[1] After finishing high school in 1935, Fackenheim recalls that, "what mattered to me most was how to be a Jew. Certain that what was needed was to be found in Judaism, I went to Berlin to study at the famed Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums."[2]

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[1] Morgan, Michael, ed. *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader,* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 350

[2] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 14

Two years later, in 1937, Fackenheim returned to Halle, and attended the Martin Luther University. He was the last Jewish student permitted to enroll there. A year and a half later, in 1938, Fackenheim returned to Berlin to resume his rabbinical studies at the Hochschule.

On the evening of November 9, 1938, almost a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, the German government carefully orchestrated a campaign of anti-Jewish violence throughout the Reich. Over the next 48 hours rioters burned or damaged more than 1,000 synagogues, and they ransacked and broke the windows of more than 7,500 Jewish owned businesses throughout Germany. The Nazis arrested some 30,000 Jewish men between the ages of 16 and 60 and sent them to concentration camps. This "pogrom" was given the name *Kristallnacht* or "Night of Broken Glass." In its aftermath, Jews lost the illusion that they had a future in Germany.

On November 10, 1938 Fackenheim arrived at the Hochschule with another student and was surprised to find the doors locked. They walked up and down the main streets of Berlin, stepped over the broken glass, and gazed in horror at the Jewish buildings that had been destroyed. Fackenheim called his mother in Halle, and learned that the German police had arrested and taken his father away. He immediately returned to Halle to be with his mother. The next morning, on November 11, Fackenheim was arrested in Halle, and taken to Sachsenhausen, a concentration camp just outside of Berlin.

Fackenheim describes Sachsenhausen as a training ground for Auschwitz. Many years later Fackenheim spoke about the terrible conditions he experienced there;

> All of this time we were doing terrible hard labor.
> And we were underfed. But the worst part was the cold,

> and I still have frostbite to this day. I also developed digestive troubles, because you couldn't relieve yourself when you had to. It took a long time to get over this. They would come in the middle of the night and make us do exercises, jumping on the beds. The beds would get dirty and we'd have to clean them up, but there was no way to clean them up. [3]

Fortunately, in 1939 the Germans were still releasing prisoners from Sachsenhausen, if the prisoner could prove that he could leave the country quickly. Fackenheim was one of the last prisoners to be released in February 1939, after three months at Sachsenhausen. When Fackenheim left Sachsenhausen, he recalls that there were three hundred of the original six thousand prisoners left behind. [4] Many of those men were never released.

During the entire duration of the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators undertook a systematic state-sponsored killing of six million Jewish men, women, and children and millions of others. Their aim was to rid the world of Jews and Judaism. Although the Germans killed victims from several groups, the Holocaust is primarily associated with the murder of the Jews. Only the Jews were targeted for total annihilation, and their elimination was central to Hitler's vision of a new Germany. The intensity of the Nazi campaign against the Jews continued unabated to the very end of the war and at points even took priority over German military efforts.

The word Holocaust is derived from the Greek *holokauston,* a translation of the Hebrew word *olah,* meaning a burnt sacrifice offered whole to God. This word was chosen because in the ultimate manifestation of the Nazi killing program, the

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[3] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 352
[4] Ibid., p. 352

extermination camps, the bodies of victims were consumed whole in the crematoria and open fires.

After his release from Sachsenhausen in 1939, Fackenheim did not leave Germany immediately, even though he had been told by the German police that if he did not leave Germany within six weeks, he would be put back in the concentration camp and not released again. Instead, taking a huge risk, Fackenheim returned to Berlin and passed his rabbinical examinations, which took almost two months. Fackenheim was ordained by Rabbi Leo Baeck, who had been his Midrash teacher at the Hochschule. After that Fackenheim fled Germany for good.

In the weeks before Kristallnacht, realizing that conditions in Germany for Jews were worsening quickly, Fackenheim had sent letters to ten American universities applying for scholarships. Harvard was the only university that answered him, and it was through Harvard that Fackenheim obtained a scholarship to the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. In the spring of 1939 Fackenheim arrived in Scotland, where he persued doctoral studies at the University of Aberdeen. That was the same year that Britain declared war on Germany. Unfortunately, Fackenheim explains that in 1940 Fackenheim's status as an enemy alien of military age in wartime led to the end of his studies at Aberdeen. He was arrested and taken to an interment camp in Scotland. A few weeks later Fackenheim was deported to Canada, where he spent the next twenty months in another interment camp near Sherbrooke, Quebec. This was Fackenheim's first experience in Canada.

When he was released Fackenheim went to Toronto, where a family from Vienna had offered to sponsor him. By this time Fackenheim had already been accepted at the University of Toronto. He recalls his first experience there;

> [I] told the head of the department, Professor G. S. Brett, that because of my rabbinical degree, the University of Aberdeen had accepted me as a graduate student. He said, 'If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for us. Let's stop talking about all this foolishness.' We started in on Aristotle, and I felt like I had never left home. That was my second 'first' experience of Canada, and I never forgot it. Over the years, I received many offers from other institutions. But until I was ready to make aliyah, I really had no desire to leave the University of Toronto. [5]

Fackenheim completed his PhD degree in 1945. In the years from 1943 to 1948 Fackenheim was the rabbi of a Reform congregation, Anshe Sholom Synagogue in Hamilton, Ontario. Fackenheim later said that while he is glad to have had that experience as a pulpit rabbi, he realized that he was better suited to academia. [6]

In 1948 Fackenheim became a member of the faculty of the University of Toronto and taught philosophy there for thirty-six years. Early in his teaching career Fackenheim concentrated on the post-Kantian tradition in German philosophy. After the Six Day War, in 1967, the Holocaust became central to Fackenheim's writing and teaching. He made repeated attempts to come to terms with the Holocaust. In that effort, Fackenheim turned to the history of philosophy. He sought answers in the ideas put forth by Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard and even Heidegger. [7] Fackenheim spent the most time on Hegel's ideas, to which he was particularly drawn. Nevertheless Fackenheim's work on

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[5] Ibid., p.355
[6] Ibid., p.355
[7] Fackenheim despised Heidegger for having supported the Nazis and failing to repent having done so.

Hegel was soon replaced by his work on the Holocaust. He became progressively more consumed by the problems of Judaism after the Holocaust.

In 1983 Fackenheim returned to Germany for the first time in forty five years to address a group of Christian students in the *Papst Johannes Haus* in Krefeld. Fackenheim's last address on German soil had been as a student rabbi on Yom Kippur 1938, in the Baden-Baden synagogue just before the Nazis burned it down. One year after visiting Krefeld, Fackenheim returned to Germany again, this time to Berlin to address a Jewish audience. Fackenheim had not been in Berlin since he fled in 1939. Fackenheim later described these two visits back to Germany as having been very difficult for him. Returning to both Krefeld and Berlin brought back painful repressed memories for Fackenheim. In Berlin Fackenheim was saddened by the destruction the war had caused to the once been a beautiful city. Much of Berlin had not yet been rebuilt in 1984. After attending both a Liberal and an Orthodox synagogue service in Berlin, and encountering several Jews there, it was with a heavy heart that Fackenheim later wrote;

> And so I understood: the Third Reich, which murdered
> most of the Jews in Europe, also destroyed a spiritual reality
> to which I was deeply attached since childhood on, and
> which lasted from Moses Mendelssohn to Leo Baeck.
> It destroyed German Judaism. [8]

Fackenheim and his wife, Rose first visited Israel in the summer of 1968. Fackenheim says that they immediately fell in love with Israel. The crowds at the airport awaiting the visitors gave them the feeling that Israel was all one family. The first Hebrew sign they saw at a gas station in Tel Aviv, Fackenheim later described as "mute

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[8] Morgan, Michael, ed. *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader,* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 362

testimony to Jewish life as a flesh and blood reality, not merely a 'spiritual' one!" [9] Fackenheim and his wife returned to Israel each summer after that with their children. When Fackenheim retired from the University of Toronto in 1984, the family made aliyah to Israel. In Israel Fackenheim became a fellow at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University and taught at the Jerusalem campus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Almost twenty years later, Emil Fackenheim died in Jerusalem on September 19, 2003 at the age of eighty seven.

Revelation [10] was a recurring topic in Fackenheim's essays and books. In this paper I will examine Fackenheim's evolving understanding of Revelation in Judaism, as it developed chronologically in his written work, over a period of nearly sixty-five years. I have divided the study into three chronological sections: The Early Years: 1938-1966, The Middle Years: 1967-1981, and The Later Years: 1981-2003. Each section will trace the evolution of Fackenheim's views on Revelation in Judaism, as they developed over his lifetime. I will also identify and discuss many of the philosophical and religious influences on Fackenheim's understanding of revelation.

We will see that in the early years of his writing Fackenheim approached the topic of revelation from the point of view of a Jewish Philosopher, rather than that of a Jewish Theologian. By his later years, it will become evident that Fackenheim's approach to revelation has changed to that of a Jewish Theologian. Yet, Fackenheim did not abandon philosophy altogether. He continued to draw upon philosophy where he could,

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[9] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Reflections on Aliyah," *Midstream,* August-September, 1885. p. 27

[10] "Revelation" is capitalized in this paper when it refers to the manifestation or the Presence of the God of Judaism.

constantly evaluating both its strengths and weaknesses. Eventually, Fackenheim began to evaluate philosophy through the critical prism of the Holocaust.

Throughout the chronology of Fackenheim's writings, presented in this paper, we will see that Fackenheim's Jewish faith never faltered. Fackenheim remained committed to his Jewish belief in Revelation; that the God of Judaism enters into this world. From the middle years of his writing on, Fackenheim struggled to understand and explain Revelation in Judaism in light of the events of the Holocaust. In the end, we will see that Fackenheim arrived at his ultimate understanding of Revelation in Judaism in the light of a variety of turning points in Judaism, including, most recently the Holocaust and the rise of the modern State of Israel.

Chapter 1

The Early Years: 1938-1966

Emil Fackenheim was both a student and a teacher of philosophy. His love of philosophy and the philosophical method of inquiry are apparent in his written work. Yet, Fackenheim was not only a philosopher. He was also a Jew of unshakable faith and that too is apparent throughout his writing.

Philosophy and faith are often at odds, but revelation[1] is based on faith. The philosophical theories that Fackenheim argues against often seem to ground his faith. Fackenheim expresses his problems with rationalist philosophies that do not include faith, and in so doing he argues in favor of religious faith. In the process of analysis and argument, Fackenheim's commitment to his own Jewish faith deepens. The religious philosophies that affirm Fackenheim's faith form the basis for his views on revelation.

To better understand Fackenheim's views on revelation in the early years, it is important to have a basic understanding of the philosophies he rejects, as well as those he defends. The dialectical method Fackenheim uses to examine all the theories that he analyzes, including his own, remains consistent throughout his work, regardless of the conclusions he draws from them. All of this, in combination, forms the basis upon which Fackenheim constructs his own understanding of revelation.

The style and method of Fackenheim's writings reflect the influence of the deductive and logical reasoning of the German Idealist philosophers. German Idealism dominated German philosophy from the late eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth

[1] "revelation" is not capitalized in this paper unless it refers to the manifestation or the Presence of the God of Judaism.

century. Fackenheim was influenced by the German Idealists' methods for attaining philosophical truth. This is evident in the systematic nature of his philosophical thought. He moves from point to point and thought to thought with careful attention to the connections between each thought. Fackenheim does not pass abruptly from one thought to another or make arbitrary transitions. Rather, Fackenheim is a philosophical dialectical thinker. He considers each point and its logical counter-point to arrive at his conclusions. Fackenheim writes in this fashion when he is dealing strictly with philosophical issues, as well as when he is dealing strictly with Jewish religious issues. In his articles he approaches the topics of revelation and God using this logical dialogue of questions and answers, in an effort to arrive at his conclusions philosophically.

Fackenheim constantly struggles with being both a philosopher and a committed Jew. He expresses his dilemma when he asks; "How can thinking be at once truly philosophical and yet essentially Jewish?" [2] Philosophy requires objectivity and universality, while Judaism accepts revelation as a source of truth over and above reason itself. Fackenheim's writings show his respect for philosophy and his commitment to its logical methods of inquiry. At the same time, Fackenheim struggles to defend "the respectability of revelation" [3] with the same method of logical inquiry. According to Fackenheim, "Revelation is not wholly inaccessible to philosophic reason...This requires, in the first place, that the philosopher, qua philosopher, should suspend judgment as to

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[2] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 52

[3] Morgan, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader* (*Detroit*: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 35

the actuality of revelation." [4] Each article reveals that Fackenheim is also equally committed to faith regarding his Jewish beliefs. In his efforts to reconcile philosophy and faith, Fackenheim often moves from philosopher to Jewish theologian, leaving the stamp of his Jewish beliefs on his philosophical work.

In an early essay, "Can There Be Judaism without Revelation?" [5] through careful and reasoned analysis, regarding the nature of God and the nature of time, Fackenheim concludes that "revelation in principle is impossible." [6] Yet, for Fackenheim, revelation cannot be impossible because Judaism is based on "the possibility of revelation in principle." [7] A few paragraphs later, after also carefully concluding that science and metaphysics neither refute nor offer evidence for revelation, Fackenheim asks; "What is to prevent us from accepting it [revelation] simply on faith?" [8] Faith, Fackenheim explains is "The sole positive answer to questions of ultimate importance, the asking of which is still reason's prerogative, but which reason is no longer able to answer." [9] Fackenheim continues logically to show that faith is necessary, although what faith itself affirms is not logically verifiable.

Fackenheim's thought regarding revelation shows the profound influence of the philosophical thought of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig. Fackenheim was well acquainted with the views of both Buber and Rosenzweig regarding revelation. He agreed with much of their thought and, in formulating his own understanding of revelation, Fackenheim borrowed from both Buber and Rosenzweig. Fackenheim's views

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[4] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 54
[5] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Can There be Judaism Without Revelation?" *Commentary* 12, 1951
[6] Ibid., p. 565
[7] Ibid., p. 568
[8] Ibid., p. 567
[9] Ibid., p. 569

on revelation also show the influence of Leo Strauss., whose philosophy Fackenheim was also well acquainted with.

In this early period of his thought, Fackenheim's writings on revelation reflect, interpret, and often contradict important aspects of the philosophies of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, both of whom were preeminent German Idealist Philosophers. According to German Idealism, it is from human consciousness and thought that both ideas of God and the world are deduced. For Fackenheim, such theories challenge the possibility and nature of revelation in general, and present a particular challenge to Judaism, which finds its roots in revelation. It is partly in thinking through his differences with Hegel and Kant, that Fackenheim develops his own understanding of revelation.

All of Fackenheim's essays from this period clearly express his belief in Divine Revelation; the belief that an infinite God enters into the world and makes Himself present in the finite world to individuals or to a group of individuals. This is also the core belief of Fackenheim's Jewish faith. Reason, for Fackenheim does not go far enough in explaining the true essence of Judaism. Regarding Hegel's "Unified Theory of Reality" in which Hegel said that reason can systematically explain all forms of reality and allow knowledge to take the place of faith,[10] Fackenheim points out that,

> Judaism is to be understood not as an evolution of ideas in the direction of a pure rationalism, but as a confrontation of finite human existence with the infinite. Jewish "ideas" are to be understood not in themselves (in their systematic-philosophic coherence), but as a reflection of this confrontation, in historic and personal existence.[11]

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[10] "Kant," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 179
[11] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Can We Believe in Judaism Religiously?" *Commentary* 6, 1948: 525

Fackenheim explains that it is because of this essential confrontation with God that the most profound statements made in Judaism, on subjects such as sin, freedom, God's nature, life on earth and in heaven, are not scientific or systematic, but dialectical. "They express profound and irreducible tensions, struggles, conflicts—and resolutions—arising in and from the basic relationship of finite to Infinite."[12]

Although Judaism, as Fackenheim sees it, is not a religion of reason, reason is not antithetical to the teachings of Judaism. As he understands it, God, who created humanity, gave man the ability to reason and to arrive at philosophical truth. This same God was also the Giver of the Revelation at Mount Sinai, on which the Jewish faith is based.

In response to Kant's similar view that by the use of one's own reason, in the broadest sense, human beings can discover and live up to their highest potential without outside assistance, and above all without divine support or intervention,[13] Fackenheim says that this philosophy erroneously disregards the basic human need for God. "The presuppositions of the ideal of 'self-realization' are not correct—they are a self-delusion arising from the loss of all metaphysical perspective."[14] According to Fackenheim, there will always be a gap between what man is and what man knows he ought to be, regardless of his efforts. Man cannot live up to his highest moral ideal of himself because of his dual nature. Although he may try to transcend it, man will always possess his "animal nature,"[15] and try as he might to focus on his spiritual side, man's basic animal instincts will always interfere. Fackenheim explains that, "Man is a riddle unto

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[12] Ibid., p. 525
[13] "Kant," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 179
[14] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Modern Jew's Path to God" *Commentary* 9, 1950: 451
[15] Ibid., p. 453

himself; the core of the riddle lies in his apparent participation in two worlds, that of nature and spirit."[16]

This duality is inherent in human nature and for that reason it is impossible for man to bring these two sides of himself together. Fackenheim explains that,

> There is no such thing as a single unambiguous, perfect self, the source and end of ultimate integration. On the contrary, the more deeply the individual searches his soul, the more clearly does he come to understand the irreducible tensions which lie in his nature.[17]

Human nature will always be contradictory. Man can never "transcend himself in the search for truth and value."[18] This creates frustration and deep despair in the human experience. The result is often nihilism, or the outlook according to which traditional values and beliefs are thought to be unfounded and existence is understood as senseless and useless.

Thus, Fackenheim believes that only "an existing God; a God who speaks through the turmoil and confusion of human life...resolves this contradiction."[19] Man needs God to bridge the gap within him and bring meaning and purpose to his life. God created man with both an inclination towards evil, which is reflective of his animal nature, and an inclination towards good, which is reflective of man's spiritual nature. Fackenheim points out a Midrash that explains God's role in helping man to live with the paradox of his human nature. "The Israelites say to God, 'Lord of the world, Thou knowest how hard is the strength of the evil inclination.' God says, 'Remove it a little in this world, and

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[16] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Can There be Judaism Without Revelation?" *Commentary* 12, 1951: 569
[17] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Self-Realization and the Search for God," *Judaism* 1, 1952: 292
[18] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Modern Jew's Path to God" *Commentary* 9, 1950: 452
[19] Ibid., p. 453

I will rid you of it altogether in the world-to-come.'"[20] This Midrash explains that with God's help, man can accept the contradictions in his nature and in his life, because he can ultimately believe that God will judge him with mercy in light these contradictions. According to Buber, "Man is accepted as he is with of his urges and passions, and included in holiness."[21]

In the mid-nineteenth century Hegel proposed the theory of "historicity;" the view that metaphysical truth is no longer to be understood as transcending history, but rather as being essentially tied to it. If so, then metaphysical truths change throughout history. Metaphysics refers to the branch of philosophy that attempts to understand the fundamental nature of all reality, whether visible or invisible. Metaphysics includes a wide range of controversial entities believed by many people to exist beyond the physical. Metaphysics attempts to answer the questions that are unanswerable by scientific observation. Hegel believed that what was held as metaphysical truth in one age was different from the unquestionable truth of another age. Historical events, then, alter what is accepted as "timeless truth." because they alter the essential nature of man.

Fackenheim disagrees, arguing that metaphysical truths are indeed timeless and human nature does not change in reaction to history. "In metaphysical discourse man can rise above history to a grasp of timeless truths."[22] In order to act in history man must seek to rise above it. He needs perspectives in terms of which to understand its situations, timeless truths and values in terms of which to act in it.

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[20] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Self-Realization and the Search for God," *Judaism* 1, 1952: 306
[21] Buber, Martin, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible." In *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, ed. Asher D. Biemann, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2002) 53.
[22] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Metaphysics, Historicity and Historicism," *The Personalist* 46, 1965: 9

Metaphysical presuppositions are not provable, but neither are they refutable. According to Fackenheim, there are some metaphysical truths that neither observation nor experience can refute. In the past when metaphysics denied the existence of God, it did not deny the idea of timeless metaphysical truths. According to Michael Morgan, Fackenheim maintains that "even if one were to accept a modern existential notion of the individual as a self-constitutive process operating in a situation—biological, cultural, and so on—this does not preclude the possibility of philosophical transcendence, i.e., a kind of thinking that grasps timeless truths."[23] The theory that the validity of metaphysical presuppositions depends on the historical setting, within which they arise, marks a completely new understanding of metaphysics.

With the loss of unchanging metaphysical truths, God becomes merely an ideal produced in the human mind in an earlier age that is no longer relevant. An irrelevant God or no God at all, leaves humanity with a serious problem. Without God, man becomes the judge of morality; of right and wrong and good and evil. What is evil can then easily be mistaken for what is moral.[24] In addition, there is nothing to bridge the gap between man's animal and spiritual nature, which can help him to distinguish between good and evil.

For Fackenheim, faith in God and the Revelation at Sinai is the timeless metaphysical truth of Judaism. Sinai was not a natural event nor was it the result of human action. Fackenheim explains that the God of Revelation in Judaism is an unchanging God. This God acts in history, but is not changed by it. Rosenzweig understood revelation as the incursion of the Divine into history and the point around

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[23] Morgan, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*, (*Detroit*: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 36-37

[24] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Self-Realization and the Search for God," *Judaism* 1, 1952: 301

which men organize their world and experiences. According to Rosenzweig, God, like the world and like man, is known through experience; specifically the experience of revelation.

According to Fackenheim, revelation in all religions has several common characteristics. Fackenheim explains that revelation is accessible to all men and is central to all religious life and beliefs. What distinguishes forms of religious life are the ways in which the experience is interpreted. What is common to all religions is that revelation is the human encounter with God in the world and in history. Although the Bible often speaks of angels in connection with revelation, Fackenheim speaks of no intervening agency in revelation. Revelation involves God's Presence alone and the effect that has on future human living. God is not known to man by detached speculation but rather by living encounter. Buber has said that "A true relationship with God, as experienced from the human side, must be an "I-Thou relationship, in which God is truly met and addressed, not merely thought of and addressed." [25] Thus man's relationship with God is a mutual one. The Infinite God enters into the finite world. Revelation, in light of its nature, is a gift to man from without; from a God other than man.

"The concept of Divine Revelation...is by definition supernatural."[26] Fackenheim explains that,

> Revelation is miraculous by definition and thus cannot be empirical fact...It will have to take place, not in time, but in the timeless moment in which eternity passes into time. That which has already happened is empirical fact, and this comes under the scrutiny of the scientist...But the miraculous... is extra-rational.[27]

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[25] Buber, Martin, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible." In *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings*, ed. Asher D. Biemann, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2002) 53
[26] Fackenheim, Emil L. "Can There Be Judaism Without Revelation?" *Commentary* 12, 1951: 568
[27] Ibid., p. 568

God descends into time and rather than destroying time, time becomes meaningful. Revelation is the sudden spontaneous entrance of Eternity into time, of God into history. The event of revelation is spontaneous, but the interpretation of what the event means to the person or people who have experienced it takes place after the event. For Fackenheim, revelation affects history in that it is interpreted in time and fulfilled in history. The future of the individual, his community, and the world are affected by the interpretative response of man to God in his own life. This is what gives revelation its historical dimension.

Besides integrating many of Rosenzweig's views on revelation in his own formulations, Rosenzweig's thought is the basis for Fackenheim's understanding that revelation is interpreted after it has been experienced. In his early essays, Fackenheim adheres to Rosenzweig's statement that "Revelation is not identical with legislation. It is nothing but the act of revelation. It is completed with "and He descended" and "He spoke" is already human interpretation."[28]

Reflecting Rosenzweig's view, in this early period of his writing, Fackenheim also maintains that there is no content or message communicated by God in revelation. Revelation is only the awareness of God's Presence. Revelation is unintelligible and beyond comprehension because God, who is wholly Other, is also necessarily beyond human comprehension. Reflecting Buber's view, Fackenheim explains that if revelation were comprehensible, it would not be true revelation, but something human that comes from inside oneself. Ideas arising in what one may think is the course of the encounter are actually by-products of revelation after it is over. Although revelation delivers no

[28] Rosenzweig, Franz, *On Jewish Learning,* ed. and trans. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1955)

content while the encounter is taking place, man subsequently interprets what he understands the content to be and is transformed by it.

The prerequisite for revelation, according to Fackenheim, is the belief that divine revelation, as Fackenheim has described it, is possible. This is the first step toward belief in God, or what Fackenheim calls faith. Fackenheim says that "We must be open to faith; let the Other...enter into our midst. [We must] act in readiness to faith."[29] No one can force faith upon themselves, but one can remove the obstacles to faith by understanding that existence is open and revelation is possible. Although one may not have experienced revelation personally, if he is open to the possibility of divine revelation, he can believe that other people have experienced the Presence of the Divine. These experiences are interpreted and documented in the sacred books of that faith. Revelation, then, becomes a religious truth and religious truths are accepted on faith.

This reflects Buber's view faith cannot be based on objective reasoning, and thus both Buber and Fackenheim, as well as Lessing and Kierkegaard before them, use the metaphor of "leaping into faith." Through faith humanity allows God to enter into its midst. Faith is a decision that must be made first. If one is closed to the incursion of God into his life it will be impossible to recognize God's Presence in Revelation "If Moses beheld the Presence of God in the burning bush it was because he was already open to that Presence."[30] A modern agnostic would see only a chemical phenomenon.

According to Fackenheim, Jewish religious thinking begins with the belief that God revealed himself to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, in the ancient past. The ancient experience of Revelation in Judaism is recorded in the Torah. The essential core of

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[29]Fackenheim, Emil L., "Our Position Toward Halacha" *The Jewish thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*, ed. Michael Morgan, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 24
[30] Fackenheim, Emil L., "On the Eclipse of God," *Commentary* 37, June 1964: 57

Judaism is the belief that God, who is Other than man, enters into the human world. Jewish religious thought accepts that the Infinite God reveals Himself to humanity in the finite world. Thus, Judaism is the living encounter of the people Israel with the God of Israel. Fackenheim is not referring to the Voice of God that is heard by the Prophets of Israel in the Bible, but to the public events of revelation that took place at the Red Sea and at Mount Sinai, as they are described in the Torah.

Fackenheim echoes Buber when he says that, "Revelation as an objective event of communication is hearable only to those already listening and the listening is a listening in faith. Jewish religious thinking regarding revelation is 'committed thinking' which stands in dialogue with the God of Israel."[31] The Jew lives in direct relationship to God through faith. Revelation is Judaism's religious truth, which must be accepted by virtue of faith. In Judaism one must accept what cannot be proven. Fackenheim says that while we cannot prove the existence of the Divine Other, neither can it be disproved. The essence of Jewish faith is the certainty that one stands in relation to a God that is neither provable nor refutable.

Fackenheim admits that faith is often difficult to attain in modernity. The notion of the Divine-human encounter contains principles that are unacceptable both to modern man and the modern Jew. Ancient and medieval Jews accepted the reality of a God who revealed Himself at Mount Sinai without question. If the existence of the Divine Other cannot be proven, Fackenheim asks whether human existence is open to the incursion of God, or if man is completely alone. This cannot be answered conclusively using reason,

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[31] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 54

and so belief in a God whose existence cannot be proven, becomes the crucial challenge to Jewish faith. Jewish existence rests on the faith that man and the Jew is not alone. After Sinai the Jew believed himself to be singled out by the God of Israel.

Many modern Jews see the faith of their ancestors as naive and lacking in intellectual sophistication. Modern man and the modern Jew can often accept only that which observation, experience and reasoned argument can prove. A critic of revelation could insist that "this supposed dialogue was merely a concealed monologue."[32] The ancient Jew believed himself to have a dialogical relationship with the Divine Other. In light of this Fackenheim asks, "Can the Jew of today come to share this faith?[33] The question is whether or not the modern Jew "can break through [his] self-made shell of subjectivity?"[34]

To answer this question, Fackenheim, refers back to Buber's statement that, "[The question is] whether the man of today can believe, by saying that while he is denied the certainty of faith, he has the power to hold himself open to faith,"[35] and that revelation can only occur when one accepts the possibility and listens in faith. Fackenheim adds that "No conceivable datum-neither a natural fact nor an inner experience nor an existing scripture can serve as an authority authenticating a religious truth except for those already prepared to accept that truth on faith."[36] Fackenheim's view, in this case, is also influenced by Leo Strauss, who said that "In the case of revelation, there are no impartial

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[32] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The God of Israel: Can the Modern Jew Believe in Revelation?" *Proceedings of the National Hillel Summer Institute,* (Washington, 1962) 7
[33] Ibid., p. 7
[34] Ibid., p. 7
[35] Buber, Martin, "The Man of Today and the Jewish Bible." In *The Martin Buber Reader: Essential Writings,* ed. Asher D. Biemann, (New York, Palgrave Macmillan: 2002) 55
[36] Fackenheim, Emil L., "On the Eclipse of God," *Commentary* 37, June 1964: 57

observers."[37] According to Strauss, revelation is not meant to establish faith in God, but rather, revelation presupposes faith in the observer.

Fackenheim explains that to one who believes, "faith is the immediate relation between himself and God."[38] To the skeptic "faith is merely the feeling of standing in such a relation [with God], plus an inference from that feeling to an actual God. Fackenheim describes the experience a skeptic of faith might have;

> Perhaps the man of today can still be aware of the Absolute... Perhaps on occasion it breaks through as the "border" of human existence, incomprehensible, unintelligible, inexpressible, God's voice. Silencing every word and every thought: unintelligible to a degree that man barely dares to approach it...[39]

Fackenheim adds that if the Jew remains open to the incursion of God into his life, he may be able to recognize God's Presence in such an incursion.

Another modern challenge to faith in Judaism is the unprecedented tragedies that have taken place in the twentieth century.[40] In light of all this, it is difficult for a number of modern Jews to sustain the belief in a God who is concerned with humanity. According to Fackenheim this is a misunderstanding of Judaism. We have already said that the God of Judaism reveals Himself, but in Jewish experience, beginning with the ancients, God also conceals Himself. Fackenheim describes this, using the metaphor of an eclipse, as an "eclipse of God" It is Buber who first uses the phrase "eclipse of God" in describing the era of the Holocaust. An eclipse of the sun, for example, occurs when the moon comes between the sun and the eye of the earthly observer. The sun has not

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[37] Strauss, Leo, "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy" *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* Vol. III, 1979: 115
[38] Ibid., p. 57
[39] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Our Position Toward Halacha" *The Jewish thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader,* ed. Michael Morgan, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 23
[40] Fackenheim is referring to the Holocaust.

changed or disappeared, but it is hidden temporarily. God does not cease to exist, but at times, for reasons we cannot comprehend, it is as if something opaque has interposed itself between God and man, and God is hidden temporarily. Fackenheim points out that according to Jewish tradition, "...unaccountably God has hidden His face; that He has hidden it for only a while; and that He will turn His face back to man again."[41] Thus God is not absent, but rather, He is temporarily concealed.

According to Fackenheim, "The God of Judaism, while "near" at times, is for what ever reason "far" at other times. But the "far" God still exists and nearness is always a living possibility. The dialectic between near and far is all pervasive in Jewish experience."[42] When ancient and medieval Jews faced tragedies that tested their faith, they did not question God's existence.[43] The modern Jew struggles to understand a God that distances Himself from His people, especially in times of crisis. But, God cannot be understood by man. According to Fackenheim, Judaism accepts this mystery of a God who is radically Other than man and who cannot be understood beyond what God reveals of Himself. In Midrash there are many accounts of the Divine-human encounter. Rabbis of Midrash expressed this through anthropomorphisms, and by using the term *ki 've 'yakhol* or "as it were," which indicated the symbolic or metaphorical character of the statement it qualifies.

Judaism stands or falls on belief in a God who cannot be explained and is fundamentally mysterious in His Otherness. The Jewish God reveals Himself in the finite world, and the Jew who is open to the meeting is ultimately affected. The God of Israel,

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[41] Fackenheim, Emil L., "On the Eclipse of God," *Commentary* 37, June 1964: 57
[42] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Judaism and the Meaning of Life," *Commentary* 39, April 1965: 50
[43] Fackenheim is referring to the tragic destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem and Israel's exile from their Land.

as reflected in the Bible and Talmud, entered into the world at Sinai in order to reveal His nature and His will to the people of Israel. Revelation at Sinai explains the origin of Jewish people, as a people. God is radically other than man, but He descends to the top of Mount Sinai to confront man. This is the fundamental feature and mystery of Judaism. Fackenheim says that,

> In Judaism the fundamental and all penetrating occurrence is a primordial mystery and a miracle of miracles: the Divine though dwelling on high and infinitely above man, yet bends down low so as to accept and confirm man in his finite humanity; and man though met by Divine Infinity, yet may and must respond to this meeting in and through his finitude.[44]

The Divine accepts and confirms the human in the moment of meeting. The meaning conferred upon human life by the Divine-human encounter cannot be understood in terms of some finite human purpose supposedly more ultimate than the meeting itself. This is because nothing could be more ultimate than the Presence of God. In that moment the Divine Commanding Presence does not communicate a finite content which the human recipient can appropriate or appraise in the light of familiar standards. The voice is not a familiar one, such as the voice of conscience, reason or spiritual creativity. Fackenheim explains that in the moment of Revelation at Sinai, God's Presence was so overwhelming to humanity, that man's ability to freely accept or reject the Presence no longer existed. Fackenheim explains that if there was human freedom at all in the moment of revelation, it can only be "heteronymous freedom; the kind, that is, which is conditioned by fear or hope." [45] If, in his encounter with God, man is capable

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[44] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Judaism and the Meaning of Life," *Commentary* 39, April 1965: 49
[45] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 66

only of heteronymous freedom, then the event of the Divine Presence at Sinai would have reduced man "to a will-less tool of a blind fate."[46] In light of all this, it should have been impossible for man, who is finite, to even survive the touch of the Infinite God. But, this is not what happened at Sinai, nor was this the primordial experience of Judaism.

Fackenheim points to a Midrash from Exodus Rabbah that explains the human reaction to the Divine Presence at Sinai in a metaphorical account of Revelation at Sinai.[47] Fackenheim summarizes the Midrash as follows;

> On the instant when Israel heard the First Commandment their souls left them. So the Commandment returned to God and said: Sovereign of the universe! Thou art life and thy Torah life; yet Thou hast sent me to the dead! ... Thereupon God modified the communication to make it more palatable...[48]

Our ancestors accepted God's Commanding Presence at Sinai and let themselves be addressed, a decision that, according to Fackenheim, was not forced upon them. In Judaism the Divine manifested Itself as a Commanding Presence, and in order to be commanding, God required that humanity survive the encounter and be allowed total human freedom. The freedom required at this moment was "the freedom to accept or reject the Divine Commanding Presence as a whole and for its own sake,"[49] because at the moment of revelation nothing is commanded yet. This is the moment when the Israelites as a people say "we shall do and hearken"[50]

The Divine Commanding Presence thus gave man the power to choose. Were It not present, man would not have had to make a choice, so the Divine Presence itself

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[46] Ibid., p. 66
[47] Exodus Rabbah, 5:9 and 29:4.
[48] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Can There be Judaism Without Revelation?" *Commentary* 12, 1951: 571.
[49] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 67
[50] Exodus 24:7.

forces the actual choosing upon man. It does not force man to choose God, but man is left with only two alternatives; he can either accept or reject the Presence.

"If and when a man chooses to accept the Divine Commanding Presence he accepts the Divine Will as his own."[51] In Judaism God confirms and accepts man by commanding him in his humanity. The response that is called for is obedience to God; an obedience that is to be expressed in finite human terms. Man must remain human because he is commanded as a human and thus accepted as human.

What took place at Sinai was a succession of overwhelming religious experiences that in the moment of revelation was completely new and unnamable. In his explanation of this, Fackenheim incorporates Buber's use of the expression "the One Without Name."[52] Fackenheim explains that, "The presence of the Nameless was felt in experiences that were themselves nameless."[53] These experiences were not specifically Jewish. The experience of the Nameless is the core of all religious life. What sets Judaism apart is the way in which the Nameless experience was interpreted.[54]

> The rule is that the Nameless, and the nameless experience, at once relate themselves to something familiar and nameable. In virtue of this relation, they themselves are given names. Thus a religion comes into being.[55]

In other religions the Nameless and the nameless experience were often related to the natural world, and thus, gave rise to the "ritualistic imitation of the rhythms of

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[51] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 67
[52] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Jewish Existence and the Living God," *Commentary* 28, 1959: 129.
[53] Ibid., p. 129
[54] Ibid., p. 129
[55] Ibid., p. 129

nature."[56] According to Fackenheim, at Sinai the Nameless and the nameless experience was not related to nature, but to something else that was familiar and nameable; a call to action. In the following quote Fackenheim explains how, after being named a call to action, it was interpreted, and, as we noted above, the Jewish religion came into being.

> The familiar and nameable which received religious Significance was not nature, but human action. But the nameless experience was not action. It had to interpret itself as a call to action. And this call could not be a call unless it was 'heard.' Nor could there be a 'hearing' unless there was a "speaking." The Nameless interpreted itself as a 'speaking' and the nameless experience as 'hearing.' What was heard was a commandment and a promise.[57]

The commandments manifested as a call to action with the promise of consequences which would follow if the call was heeded.

The "primeval Hebrew experience; the Presence of the Nameless, manifested itself in the form of a Divine human covenant."[58] This was not an individual but a collective experience, which therefore manifested in a covenant between the Nameless and a people. The Nameless became their God; a Divine Presence in the world and the Infinite God of Revelation. The Divine commandments initiated a relationship of mutuality between God and man. Along with the commandments given over for human action went the promise of Divine action, and because Divine action made itself contingent upon human action, a relationship of mutuality was established. This reflects Buber's view that the dialogue between God and people of Israel is epitomized in the covenant. According to Fackenheim, the seemingly impossible relationship became possible in the covenantal relationship between man and God. Yet this relationship

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[56] Ibid., p. 130
[57] Ibid., p. 130
[58] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Judaism and the Meaning of Life," *Commentary* 39, April 1965: 50

remained destructible at human hands. If it were simply mutual it would have been destroyed by man almost as soon as it was established. But, God puts up with persistent human failures. The covenant survived because God's patience is Absolute. The covenant remained mutual in the sense that Divine action remained part of the mutuality as a response to human deeds. But Divine action also broke through this limitation and maintained the covenant in unilateral love"[59]

Throughout the Bible men continued to rebel against their respective covenants with God [60] but they could not destroy them. Sin caused God to punish Israel, but no conceivable sin could cause God to forsake Israel. "Divine Love has made the covenant indestructible."[61] The covenant continued to exist in times of both Divine nearness and remoteness.

Although they are not identical, Fackenheim's thought here shows the influence of Rosenzweig's views on Revelation and Divine Love. According to Rosenzweig, Revelation is initiated by God as the process of relating, first God to man, and then, man to God, and finally, through God, man relates to the world. Rosenzweig writes, in 1917 in a letter, "The human being...can acquire personal identity as an individual only through the call that is the revelation of the Other: God– but also some other human being."[62] In *The Star of Redemption,* Rosenzweig says that Revelation is the continual command to love God, and through God, to love one's fellow human beings. Divine Love evokes a response of love in man, which is experienced in man's relationship with his neighbor in

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[59] Ibid., p. 50
[60] Fackenheim is referring to God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:4-9 and God's covenant with Israel at Sinai in Exodus 19:6
[61] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Judaism and the Meaning of Life," *Commentary* 39, April 1965: 50
[62] "Rosenzweig" *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998) 357

the world. Fackenheim will return to these concepts later in his discussion of revealed morality.

Buber's understanding of revelation can also be seen underlying Fackenheim's view. In his book, *I and Thou,* Buber expresses the basic formulation of his dialogical notion of relation. According to Buber, there are two essentially different ways of relating to others. The most common way is in an "I-it" relationship, in which people and things are experienced as objects. The second way is the "I-Thou" relationship, which is mutually affirming relationship with another person, [63] and at the same time a mutually affirming relationship with God, the eternal Thou. It is these meetings that constitute revelation for Buber.

Judaism is a commitment to follow God's commandments in a covenantal relationship. God's commandments and laws are known to Israel through revelation at Sinai. The laws and commandments of Judaism reflect what Fackenheim refers to as "the revealed morality of Judaism."[64] Fackenheim says that "Theologians often claim that revelation is the sole source of our knowledge of moral law.[65] Philosophy is forced to reject this claim. According to philosophy in general,

> To be obligated to any law man must be able to know that law; and to qualify as moral, a law must be universally obligatory. But, on the admission of theologians themselves, revealed moral law is accessible only to those who possess the revealed Scriptures.[66]

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[63] The I-Thou relationship is not limited to other persons; it may also exist with animals, trees, and works of art, to name a few.
[64] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 51
[65] Ibid., p. 56
[66] Ibid., p. 56

In Kant's "Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals" written in 1785, he says that any law that is externally imposed, such as revealed law, cannot be moral. According to Kant, in order to be moral a law has to be self-imposed. If one follows a law that is imposed by an outside source, including God, it must be at least in part, obeyed because of the fear of impending consequences that would result if the law were not obeyed. Fackenheim points out that although outside factors might induce one to obey a law, "no law in heaven or on earth can obligate us to obey unless we accept ourselves as obligated to obey. And unless we can accept ourselves as obligated we cannot be obligated."[67] The Kantian thesis poses what Fackenheim calls, an unprecedented challenge to every revealed morality, regardless of content, and simply by virtue of its being revealed.

Fackenheim disagrees with Herman Cohen's interpretation of Kant's thesis. Cohen says that humans, by imposing moral law on themselves, create moral law. Moral law, which according to Kant cannot be super-imposed on humanity, is then the collective creation of the human spirit. Fackenheim points out that Kant emphatically denies that man creates moral law for himself. This denial, on Kant's part, according to Fackenheim, points to Kant's often overlooked conviction "that in order to impose moral law on himself, man need be neither its individual nor collective creator. He need be capable only of appropriating a law, which in fact he has not created, as though he had created it."[68]

This leaves religious man in general with two choices. If he accepts laws as moral because they are the Will of God, he "not only submits to an alien law, but he

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[67] Ibid., p. 59
[68] Ibid., pp. 60-61

submits to it because it is alien."[69] He cannot impose that law on himself, but obeys it because of external sanctions only. In the second alternative, man can ascribe laws to God because they are intrinsically moral and known to be so apart from the fact that they are the will of God. In that case, if man can recognize the intrinsic morality of the law, he can impose laws upon himself and achieve moral autonomy. But, this is problematic in Judaism; by imposing moral law upon himself, the fact that the law is God-given becomes irrelevant. Fackenheim adds that,

> This may suggest to the philosopher that, once permanent law of intrinsic value has made its appearance in Judaism, the divine commanding Presence of the pristine moment has vanished into an irrelevant past...Once revelation has become specified as a system of laws, new and revealing immediacy is either false or superfluous.[70]

Yet, Fackenheim writes, that in Judaism "the source and life of the revealed morality"[71] relies on the togetherness of a "Divine Commanding Presence, which never dissipates itself into irrelevance, and a human response which freely appropriates what it receives."[72] We have already noted that Revelation in Judaism was not an experience of heteronymous freedom, or freedom conditioned by fear. Thus, we can eliminate the possibility in Judaism that the revealed law is obeyed out of fear, awe or hope. In light of this, Fackenheim says, we still need to examine, what seem to be, the only remaining possible responses to the revealed law of Judaism. The first possibility is that one can obey the law for its own sake, by recognizing and appropriating its intrinsic value. In that case one obeys the law only for its own sake. God who gave the law, becomes irrelevant

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[69] Ibid., p. 62
[70] Ibid., p. 68
[71] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 64
[72] Ibid., p. 64

in the appropriation process, as does the revealed quality of the law itself. Regarding the second possible response to the revealed law of Judaism Fackenheim says,

> Or one obeys it because it is revealed. But then one could not obey it either for God's sake or for its own; not the former because the Divine having lost commanding presence—immediacy—after the rise of law, would have reduced itself to the mere external sanction behind the law; and not the latter because the law then would then need such sanctions. [73]

But, Fackenheim asks, "Must the divine Presence pass into irrelevance once revealed morality has appeared?" [74] In response Fackenheim tells us, that Jewish thought and Jewish life attests to the fact that this is not the case in Judaism. In Judaism "the Divine Commanding Presence does not pass into irrelevance once the moral law has assumed permanence and intrinsic value."[75] According to Kant's thesis such a scenario would be impossible. Fackenheim points out a hidden premise in Kant's thesis; for Kant morality involves the relationship between two humans. This is not the case in Judaism. In Judaism revealed morality involves a three fold relationship. It involves two human beings, and also includes God.[76] Thus, God is not reduced to an external sanction behind the law, but rather God enters into the relationship between men. "He [God] confronts man with the demand to turn to his human neighbor and in doing so, turn back to God Himself."[77] This is the core of Jewish morality and the message in Micah 6:8 [78] Humble walking before God must manifest itself in justice and mercy to the human neighbor, but justice and mercy are incomplete unless they culminate in humility before God. To obey

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[73] Ibid., p. 69
[74] Ibid., p. 69
[75] Ibid., p. 69
[76] The view that morality involves two human beings and God, shows the underlying influence of Rosenzweig's statement that is quoted on page 20 of this thesis.
[77] Ibid., p. 70
[78] "He has declared to you what is good and what God requires of you: Only to do justice, and to do goodness, and to walk modestly with your God." (Micah 6:8) Translation: *JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999) 1349

God man accepts both his fellow man and the commandment concerning him, as having intrinsic value, and performs the commandment for its own sake. Yet, the commandment is fragmentary if it is performed only for its own sake alone. If both man and the commandment have intrinsic value it is ultimately because God reveals that to man. The intrinsic value of both man and the commandment, which relates to man, does not make God an external sanction to the law. God is not kept from direct human access by the intrinsic value of man, or by the intrinsic value of the commandment that relates to man. Rather, God reveals himself "through all intrinsic value as its ultimate source."[79]

For the sake of philosophy Fackenheim asks the obvious question; how can finite man participate in a relationship with the Infinite God? The answer is that God makes it possible. Fackenheim explains that man is able to appropriate Divine commandments because God allows human appropriation of them, and that man can be in a three fold relationship involving God because God chooses to be in the relationship. The commandments are a gift from God to man because of God's love for man. Fackenheim says that the reality of God's love for man is as pervasive in Judaism as the revealed law itself, because Divine Love and Divine commandments are inseparable. In commanding humans, God accepts and loves man in his humanity. Thus, by accepting God's commandments and doing them, man acts for both the sake of the commandments and for the sake of God. In Judaism, the manifestation of God's love does not come after the commandments are performed, but in the commandment itself.

Fackenheim agrees with Buber when he says that the ancient Israelite understanding of Revelation, which includes the Israelite covenant with God, was

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[79] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 64

recorded in the Torah. Buber would add that the Hebrew Bible is the ancient's response to Revelation. The ancient understanding of Revelation at Sinai has lived on in one form or another for over two thousand years. From the commandments and promises in the Torah, a Jewish way of life has developed. According to Fackenheim, "The past did not kill the present; instead, reviving itself in the present, it gave life to the present."[80] This is because once the experience of the Nameless had interpreted itself as a challenge and a promise, a new religious dimension became apparent-the messianic element, the Jewish belief that at a future time both the challenge and the promise would be fulfilled. It is man's actions that move the world in the direction of redemption. Thus, the past continued to exist in the present and both past and present exist for the sake of the future. According to Buber the dialogue between God and the people of Israel is epitomized in the covenant, which lies at the basis of Jewish messianism.

The primeval experience of Revelation in Judaism did not turn into non-committal generalities. While Revelation at Sinai was a group experience, the individual commandments were addressed to individual men. Being singled out by God is crucial and common in Jewish experience. After creating the world God does not go into perpetual retirement. In the Bible, He enters the world to confront and command, among others, Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah, and to single out all of Israel at Sinai. Fackenheim explains further that "He [God] enters into history. He enters into the life of man, and even the simplest and most ordinary Jew can stand before him and know He is not distant but present."[81] In His Infinity, God is not only the God of the world, but also each man's

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[80] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Jewish Existence and the Living God," *Commentary* 28, 1959: 161
[81] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The God of Israel: Can the Modern Jew Believe in Revelation?" *Proceedings of the National Hillel Summer Institute,* (Washington, 1962) 1

personal God. Jews in the Bible and Jews now, know Him by living encounter, because God singles each man out.

The Talmud tells us that God makes each of us unique and speaks to each person in his uniqueness. The Commandments are addressed to individuals and are to be fulfilled in finite time by each generation. The Midrash tells us that the Torah is given whenever men are ready to receive it, and Fackenheim adds that that the act of receiving Torah "culminates in the confrontation with its Giver."[82] Thus, Revelation in Judaism is ongoing and the law becomes a bridge between man and God, who is eternally present. Halakhah is, then, perceived as commanded daily by God.

Fackenheim finds Revelation expressed repeatedly in the rabbinic writings and especially in the Midrash. The Midrash is the earliest reaction to the fundamental experiences of Judaism. It teaches that man's existence is incomplete without Revelation. The Midrash expresses the paradoxical relationships of the finite and the Infinite, of Divine Power and human freedom and of transcendence and immanence.[83]

Jewish tradition is chiefly concerned with the existence of man which it views in terms of history moving on from creation to the messianic "end of days." The crucial events within that history are a succession of Revelations; moments of meeting the Divine in history. The same God is present at every meeting, but each meeting singles out a unique individual or group. The Divine Presence that shaped history is still available to shape present life. History is made up of many unique events, but they come

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[82] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Revealed Morality of Judaism and Modern Thought: A Confrontation with Kant." In *Rediscovering Judaism: Reflections on a New Theology*, ed. Arnold Jacob Wolf (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965) 69

[83] Morgan, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 33.

together into one continuous history. In Judaism the events of history come together because the One God acts again and again within history.

In the next chapter, both history and Midrash will play a significant role in Fackenheim's understanding of revelation. Revelation will take on added dimension as Fackenheim examines Revelation in light of the Holocaust and the new State of Israel. The radical evil Fackenheim sees in the Holocaust will affect both his religious and philosophical thought as well. We will see changes in Fackenheim's style of writing in the next chapter, as Fackenheim reevaluates the connections between philosophy and theology in modernity. In the middle years of his writing, as a result of all these reconsiderations and new considerations, Fackenheim often separates his philosophical thought from his theological thought, in an effort to maintain the integrity of both.

Chapter 2

The Middle Years: 1967-1981

In the period from 1967 to 1981, Fackenheim wrote more than at any other time in his career as an author. The events of 1967 marked a significant turning point in Fackenheim's thought. He reconsiders his position as both a philosopher and a believing Jew, as well as the connection between philosophy and religion. As a result, the style of Fackenheim's writing and the method by which he argues for his conclusions changes. The changes in Fackenheim's understanding of revelation are the result of new considerations on his part, regarding history, Midrash and Scripture, the Holocaust and the State of Israel. During this period of Fackenheim's writing, these factors, individually and in combination, account for the most significant change in Fackenheim's thought.

In 1971 Fackenheim writes, "Philosophical integrity obligates me to speak to you as a Jewish philosopher. I could avoid this obligation only if I believed that there was such a thing as 'religion-in-general.' This, however, I believe to be an empty abstraction."[1] Fackenheim, by his own admission no longer speaks as a philosopher and a Jew separately. He now understands himself as Jewish philosopher and, as we will see, a Jewish religious thinker and theologian.

In the preface to *The God Within,* John Burbridge writes that after1967 Fackenheim no longer separates, and keeps separate, the two parts of his academic thought. Before 1967 Fackenheim explored, on the one hand, Jewish thought,

[1] Fackenheim, Emil L., *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) 112

particularly German Jewish thought, and on the other hand he concentrated on a universal perspective to philosophy, that was appropriate to the secular department of philosophy in which Fackenheim taught. This separation had collapsed by 1967. "In *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* he no longer attempts to explicate Kant Hegel and Heidegger on their own terms. They are made to dialogue with the Jewish tradition, and are thereby shown to be limited and partial."[2]

In reconsidering his earlier work, Fackenheim points out many of his own errors. In *Quest for Past and Future* written in 1968, Fackenheim acknowledges that his early works were polemics against philosophical and religious views that ran contrary to his own. Thus, he says he was totally one sided in his earlier essays. Fackenheim says that he attacked what was wrong with liberalism and ignored what was good about it. For example, "[Liberalism's] refusal to despair in an age rife with despair." [3]

Fackenheim says further that he was so anxious to defend classical Judaism from critics that he ignored the problem of how classical Judaism can come to terms with modernity. Fackenheim set up the extremes of humanism and supernaturalism in his earlier essays. He now believes that religion in modernity does not fit into these extremes. Modern religion is complex and the differences within, and between, religious thought, are more subtle.

Other errors in his thought, Fackenheim says, were the effect of being bound by theological polemic. His thought has changed because he has taken measures to liberate himself. Fackenheim explains that "Liberation occurs when the Jewish theologian takes his stand within the Jewish faith, and understands it as committed openness to the voice

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[2] Burbridge, John, preface, *The God Within: Kant, Schelling, and Historicity,* by Emil L. Fackenheim, Emil L. (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1996) xi
[3] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 8

of God" [4] The results according to Fackenheim are twofold; first, philosophy is no longer subject to the demands and constraints of theology, and as a result, when encounters between Judaism and philosophy occur, they can be genuine encounters. Second, if theology is freed of polemics, it is also free to scrutinize its own domain, and philosophy is freed to allow a similar process to take place within its domain.

In reconsidering revelation Fackenheim points out that there were errors in his previous definition of faith. Earlier, as we saw in chapter one, Fackenheim defined faith as the "The sole positive answer to questions of ultimate importance, the asking of which is still reason's prerogative, but which reason is no longer able to answer."[5] But, now Fackenheim asks if the human condition indeed does gives rise to existential questions that only faith can answer. Fackenheim now realizes that only the impartial philosopher and not the theologian could answer those questions. It is also clear that Fackenheim now considers himself to be a Jewish Theologian as well as a Jewish Philosopher. Fackenheim explains that the theologian only impairs the philosopher's freedom by speaking for him, and impairs his own theological freedom when he makes "faith and theology dependent on specific philosophies." [6]

Fackenheim says that this is both faulty philosophy and theology. He adds that his error was in setting up, as two distinct alternatives, either faith or despair, because there is despair in faith and serene confidence without faith. According to Fackenheim, agnostics and atheists have to cope with these questions on their own terms, without theologians pointing out the faith or despair in their theological position, which they are not aware of. In addition, Fackenheim adds that; "Such theological devices now seem

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[4] Ibid., p. 10
[5] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Can There be Judaism Without Revelation?" Commentary 12, 1951: 569
[6] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 9

contrary to the spirit of Judaism which will let God, but not the theologian, lead man into contrition and say 'return, ye children of man.'" [7]

Fackenheim addresses what he considers to be mistakes in his earlier definition of faith. He says that his earlier definition of faith eliminated the element of astonishment, or what Fackenheim calls "radical surprise." Revelation at Sinai and at the Red Sea were not answers to questions already formed, yet they are examples of Revelation in Judaism and both events were filled with astonishment. Fackenheim continues by saying that in the Jewish understanding of Revelation, radical surprise cannot be confined to past experiences of revelation. He writes;

> May a theology of revelation confine all radical surprise to the past? Not in Judaism, if only because of the Messianic future, for it must mingle the unexpected with the expected. Indeed, even from the pre Messianic future radical surprise cannot be eliminated, unless it is prejudged to be to be a barren sameness of working and waiting. This point may have been academic for most Jewish generations, but not for the generations which has witnessed Auschwitz. [8]

Fackenheim explains that the God of Israel is present and acts in the historical here and now, and thus, in any here and now. Jewish theological thought, no matter how firmly it is rooted in past Revelation, has always also remained open to the present and the future, and thus vulnerable to radical surprise in Revelation.

In the modern world, philosophy questions revealed authority, actual revelation, and even the possibility of revelation. Thus, it would seem that all revealed religions are doomed if they risk self-exposure to empirical logic of philosophy. But, according to Fackenheim, this will not be the case, if self-exposure in a dialogue between a revealed religion and philosophy is mutual self-exposure. This will also allow any dialogue

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[7] Ibid., p. 9
[8] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 10

between the two to be fully critical and will shed authentic light on both religion and philosophy.

Fackenheim says that there is an inherent conflict between Judaism and modern empiricism. In philosophy, empiricism is the attitude that beliefs are to be accepted and acted upon only if they first have been confirmed through the experience of the senses. Judaism is a religion of Revelation that affirms a God who's Presence can be encountered in the world. Empiricism surveys all experience and finds no God in it. The empiricist philosopher observes only the feeling of Divine Presence, and thinks that the belief in an actual Presence is an inference or an interpretation on the believer's part. But, in the believer's mind, it is not an inference or interpretation. What this discloses is that the empiricist philosopher already stands outside the "circle of a believing openness," [9] because the data he observes is only the feeling of God's Presence in the believer, and not the Presence of God. The believer stands within the circle of a believing openness when he either encounters God's Presence or fully accepts that such an encounter is possible and has occurred at another time.

Fackenheim explains that the Jewish God does not dwell in sheer transcendence above the empirical or in indescribable mystical familiarity. He says that,

> The God of Israel rules neither solely over thoughts,
> nor simply over souls, but rather over complete,
> empirical men. He can do so only if He is empirically
> manifest in the world. This characteristic is...
> inescapable in Judaism.[10]

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[9] Ibid., p. 11

[10] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Elijah and the Empiricists." In *The Religious Situation,* ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 843; Fackenheim, Emil L., *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973) 11

Jewish faith holds that a Divine Presence can and does manifest itself in the empirical world, even though only the believer is aware of that Presence.

Borrowing from Buber's *I and Thou,* Fackenheim says that biblical faith understands itself as follows:

> In a genuine divine-human encounter—if and when it occurs—Divinity is immediately present to the believer; feelings of such a Presence are a 'mere accompaniment to the metaphysical fact of the relation which is fulfilled not in the soul but between the I and Thou.'[11] When the immediate is feeling only (and a divine presence is merely inferred), there already has been a prior 'withdrawal from the encounter into self enclosed subjectivity; and when the inference is cut off the withdrawal is complete.'[12] [13]

Buber understood the divine-human encounter as an "I-Thou" relationship with the eternal "Thou." In an "I-Thou" relationship there is spontaneity and openness and immediacy. If there are feelings or preconceived notions in advance of the encounter in the mind of the "I" about the "Thou" then the "Thou" becomes an "It" and, thus, can no longer be a "Thou". In the case of Divine Revelation, God, because He is wholly Other, can never be an "It," rather, God is always a "Thou". Thus, God's Presence cannot be experienced as Divine Revelation, if God's Presence is already inferred.

Fackenheim further points out that there is a distinction between experience and faith in Revelation.

> This distinction is hardly absent in biblical faith itself, for the Psalmist does not lose faith when he fails to "see" and "hear" (when God 'hides His face') and the idolater (or rebellious Israel) may hear and see and yet refuse to believe...There is no faith when there is actual hearing but

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[11] Buber, Martin, *I and Thou* (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1958) 18
[12] Buber, Martin, *Between Man and Man* Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) 22
[13] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Elijah and the Empiricists." In *The Religious Situation,* ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 859-860; Fackenheim, Emil L., *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973) 24

> no listening, when "withdrawal" dissipates what is heard into subjective feeling. And there already is faith when there is listening openness while yet no voice is heard; when a voice once heard has fallen silent faith can remain faith, waiting in an 'eclipse of God' for a divine voice to be heard." [14]

Fackenheim reconsiders Rosenzweig's statement that "Revelation is not identical with legislation. It is nothing but the act of revelation. It is completed with 'and He descended' and 'He spoke' is already human interpretation."[15] Fackenheim argues that if "He came down" concludes the Revelation at Sinai, and "He spoke" is the beginning of human interpretation, the dichotomy between Revelation and content is too great. Rosenzweig's statement, according to Fackenheim, defends the event of Revelation from liberal or humanistic disintegration, [16] and defends the interpretation of Revelation against fundamentalist or passive literalism. But, Fackenheim now claims, Rosenzweig would not have, in the end, defended such a large dichotomy between the event of Revelation and its content. Had Rosenzweig survived and been given time to reconsider, Fackenheim asserts, that Rosenzweig would have changed his mind to agree with Fackenheim. Fackenheim explains;

> On the one hand, 'He came down' is already metaphorical... On the other hand--and this is crucial-- the event of 'descent' makes the interpretation 'He spoke' inevitable. Any interpretation other than 'He spoke' would be incompatible with the event of descent itself, for the event is a descent because it confirms man in his finite humanity. (It is not an ineffable presence which dissipates his humanity), and he is being confirmed by being spoken to—and bidden hear and respond.[17]

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[14] Ibid., p. 863; p. 27

[15] Morgan, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader,* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 36.

[16] If liberal and humanistic interpretations were placed on revelation they would change the essence of revelation, according to Fackenheim. Such interpretations would place man, and not God at the center of Divine revelation, and allow for any number of unacceptable interpretations of revelation to replace the traditional interpretations, which Fackenheim believes are authoritative.

[17] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 13

Thus, Revelation in Judaism has a built in content because Revelation is not an ineffable Presence of God into which man dissolves. Man is confirmed in his humanity because God allows him complete human freedom to respond to Revelation, and God commands man with commandments that he can fulfill in his finite humanity. God is a Presence speaking to man which singles him out for response. Fackenheim concludes that all believing openness to the future is a structured openness and not an empty one. It is an openness which listens and responds; remaining open to the possibility of Divine Revelation.

In *Quest for Past and Future,* which was published in 1968, Fackenheim also reaffirms his beliefs that had not changed over the previous twenty years. He continues to believe that "Judaism is a history of encounters between God and Israel of which the evolution of ideas is a mere human reflection." [18] He reiterates that Revelation differs in character and quality from human inspiration, and that "revelation is an event of divine incursion"[19] in this world.

A year earlier, in 1967, the Holocaust and the "Six Day War"[20] in Israel became central to Fackenheim's evolving religious thought. This marks a significant change for Fackenheim. Twenty years after the horrors of the German death camps ended, and after they were exposed to the world, Fackenheim began to express his belief that Jewish existence and thought had forever been changed by the Holocaust. In May of 1967 the

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[18] Ibid., p. 8
[19] Ibid., p. 8
[20] "The Six Day War" broke out on June 5th, 1967 and as the name implies, ended six days later, with an Israeli victory. The war was fought between Israel on one side and Egypt, Jordan and Syria on the other side. After three weeks of tension between Egypt and Israel, during which the United Nations peace-keeping force on the boarder between Israel and Egypt was expelled by the Egyptian president, Egypt built up a large military force in the Sinai, and the Gulf of Aqaba was closed to Israeli shipping. Israel struck preemptively to eliminate the threat.

very real threat of annihilation loomed over the state of Israel. Against all odds, Fackenheim says, Israel was able to secure a miraculous victory in just six days. At the same time a number of Jewish theologians, Fackenheim included, began an open and public dialogue about the untold horrors of the Holocaust.

In his introduction to this period of Fackenheim's work in *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim,* Michael Morgan writes that the Six Day War "mandated a new attentiveness to memory,"[21] for Fackenheim.

Fackenheim explains,

> That a Jew can be a faithful witness to...God, only in his particular singled out Jewish condition, not through some manner of flight from it. At Auschwitz in the 1940's and at Jerusalem in 1967, Jews were singled out and alone. Those Jews bodily present were singled physically in the one case with no choice but death, in the other with none but to fight for life. All Jews bodily present were singled out spiritually, left with no authentic choice but solidarity with their brethren. [22]

This was the "impossible and intolerable contradiction"[23] believing Jews found themselves in May, 1967. In light of the Israeli's connection to Auschwitz, when the war was won, there was "radical astonishment which gave a military victory...an inescapable religious dimension." [24]

In the introduction to *The Jewish Return into History* Fackenheim writes;

> Philosophical and religious thought widely take themselves to be immune and indeed indifferent to the 'accidents' of 'mere' history. The conscious repudiation of this view, first in abstraction and subsequently in relation to the events of

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[21] Morgan, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader,* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 113
[22] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 3
[23] Ibid., p. 26
[24] Ibid., p. 26

our age, is the major change in my thinking. [25]

Fackenheim realized that he must honestly expose himself and his Jewish thought to the Holocaust and the unspeakable horrors that took place. Fackenheim explains that a Jew today can no longer consider himself a man among other men. All Jews had been singled out for death in the Nazi attempt to annihilate the world's Jews. According to Fackenheim, every Jew must come face to face with that fact. He says that a Jew can no longer "avoid the question of what it means after Auschwitz and Jerusalem, to be a Jewish witness to the world? To avoid Auschwitz, or to act as if it had not occurred, would be blasphemous." [26]

Fackenheim points out that, through all the trials of Jewish history, Jews have always had the courage to make their faith vulnerable to actual empirical and secular history. Fackenheim explains further, that Jewish thought is strengthened by exposing itself to the important events of history and not by insulating itself from history in an effort to preserve itself. Today, this is more difficult than ever before. The historical events, to which Jewish thought must now make itself vulnerable, are the Holocaust and the rise of the Jewish State after two thousand years of exile.

Nevertheless, Fackenheim says, Jews must refuse to take refuge in any distortions about the Holocaust that make them more comfortable than they would be by facing the actual facts of the Holocaust. The Holocaust and that the centrality of the State of Israel in contemporary Jewish life cannot legitimately be compared to Jewish life anywhere else in the world.

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[25] Fackenheim, Emil L., *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) xi
[26] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 4

Modern historians may try to expel God from history, just as modern scientists expel Him from natural science. Historians and theologians claim that Hiroshima and Auschwitz have destroyed the idea of Divine providence over history, and they ask how God can rule over history and still allow for human freedom and evil. The trauma of contemporary events affects all religious belief, but Jewish religious belief is the most traumatically affected. While all religious believers have reason to reject God, Jews after Auschwitz have almost an obligation to reject Him. At Auschwitz Jews died because their great grandparents had obeyed the God of history. Fackenheim asks; "Dare a Jew of today continue to obey the God of history—and thus expose to the danger of a second Auschwitz, himself, his children and his children's children?"[27] Never before in Jewish history have Jews had such a painfully horrible reason to turn away from the God of history.

Fackenheim explains that the events of Auschwitz are beyond human comprehension, and yet they have shaken Jewish existence to its very core. This is the case not only for the Jew who believes, but also for the one who does not believe, and the one who is unsure about his belief. Nevertheless, it is impossible at this time for any Jew to think about religion, secularity, good or evil as if the Holocaust had never happened.

In addition, the Jewish believer endures the task of questioning God. He asks both how he will live with God after Auschwitz, and how he can live without Him. Yet the believer must contend with God, because he cannot let Him go. Fackenheim points out that even after the Holocaust, when the bond between God and his people has reached the breaking point, it has not been severed.

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[27] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 6

> This is the crisis situation... of every Jew *in extremis* when looking around for allies in his desperate struggle for survival in faithfulness, he finds...none but the God of the covenant Himself...In their solitary struggle for survival in faithfulness Jews have been forced a thousand times to question their one remaining ally [God].[28]

Fackenheim further explains that while religious Jews refuse to abandon God, secular Jews in Israel are reacting to the Holocaust as well. Fackenheim observes;

> A secular holiness, side by side, with religious, is becoming manifest in contemporary Jewish existence... One totally astonishing discovery: the religious quality of the secularist Israeli Jew...Jerusalem, while no answer to the Holocaust is a response; and every Israeli lives that response. Israel is collectively what every survivor is individually: a No to the demons of Auschwitz, a Yes to Jewish survival and security--and thus a testimony to life against death on behalf of all mankind. The juxtaposition of Auschwitz and Jerusalem recalls nothing so vividly as Ezekiel's vision of the dead bones and the resurrection of the household of Israel. Every Israeli—man, woman or child—stakes his life on the truth of that vision.[29]

Fackenheim points out that "Throughout all her [Israel's] existence Israel has stayed with the God of history; throughout all her existence this God of history—or, at any rate, Jewish faith in Him--has kept Israel as well." [30] According to Fackenheim, rational criticism alone will not destroy Jewish faith. The recent catastrophes alone are not enough for Jews to dispose of their God, especially when Jewish faith has survived tragedies before. In all the cases before "Jewish faith not only refused to despair of God, it also refused to disconnect Him with history or to seek escape in mysticism or

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[28] Fackenheim, Emil L., "Elijah and the Empiricists." In *The Religious Situation*, ed. Donald R. Cutler (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 841; Fackenheim Emil L., *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973) 9

[29] Fackenheim, Emil L., *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) 54

[30] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 6

otherworldliness." [31] Jewish faith, Fackenheim says, affirms that the God of history is still present in history.

Tragedies in the history of the Judaism that brought Jews to confront God and tested the Jewish faith are what Fackenheim refers to as epoch-making events. Epoch-making events threaten Judaism, and include the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. Fackenheim says that these events made demands on the Jewish faith, but did not produce a new faith. The strain of the confrontation may have come near the breaking point, yet it never destroyed the past faith.

Fackenheim points out that "The past faith had not come from nowhere but had itself originated in historical events. These historical events [from which Jewish faith originated] therefore are more than epoch-making. In the context of Judaism, we shall refer to them as "root experiences." [32] In root experiences the past event verifies that God is present in history.

The root-experiences in Judaism, as Fackenheim will explain, are the two events of Divine Revelation recorded in the Torah; God's Presence at the Red Sea in Exodus14, and God's Presence at Sinai in Exodus 20. Revelation occurs in the history of the Jewish people, and Jewish faith in the Jewish God is born out of these two events of Divine Revelation. In his earlier writing Fackenheim refers only to the Revelation at Sinai as the primordial event in Judaism. Now Fackenheim refers to both Revelation at Sinai and the Red Sea as the formative experiences of Judaism. Fackenheim refers to both of these events of Revelation as "root experiences." As he describes the importance of these

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[31] Ibid., p. 7
[32] Ibid., p. 9

events, Fackenheim will show not only how they have been essential to Jewish faith, but also how these events become the source of ongoing Revelation.

Fackenheim uses a particular Midrash that elucidates the events at the Red Sea, to more clearly illustrate his explanation of root-experiences. This particular Midrash is from *Mikhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael,* [33] an exegetical Midrash which interprets the book of Exodus, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, and sometimes word by word. The *Mikhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* was written at the end of the fourth century C.E. in the Land of Israel. The Midrash asserts that when the Israelites were leaving Egypt, [34] and had arrived at the Red Sea, the heavens opened and everyone who was there witnessed the Presence of God. In comparison to this vision, the Midrash also affirms that when the heavens opened giving the biblical prophet Ezekiel[35] a glimpse of "the chariot of God," Ezekiel did not actually see the Presence of God, but only visions and similes of God. According to the Midrash, this was the experience of all the biblical prophets. The Midrash explains that it was as though the prophets saw a human King and his servants, but could not be quite sure which one in the group was the King. At the Red Sea the exact opposite happened; all of the Israelites who were there, regardless of their status, immediately recognized that what they saw was the Presence of God and they said "This is my God and I will praise Him."[36]

This Midrash "affirms God's presence in history with full awareness of the fact that the affirmation is strange, extraordinary, or even paradoxical." [37] The God of Israel is not a mythological deity that mingles freely with men in history. He is infinitely

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[33] *Mikhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, part 2, chapter 24
[34] Exodus 14:15-30
[35] Ezekiel 1:1-28
[36] Exodus 15:2
[37] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 4

beyond human reach, and in this case at the Red Sea the heavens must open for God to become humanly accessible. Few men have ever been granted such an opening and the reports of these few experiences are unintelligible to nearly all others. But, the Midrash says that "not messengers, not angels, not intermediaries, but God himself acts in human history—and He was unmistakably present to a whole people at least once." [38]

Beyond the fact that root experiences are events of Divine Revelation, Fackenheim explains that they have a unique commonality. Fackenheim says that for an event to be a root-experience, three criteria must be met. The first condition is that "a past experience legislates to the present."[39] Such past events of Revelation as occurred at the Red Sea and at Sinai, are formative in Jewish belief and, thus, they legislates to future generations of Jews. The second condition for an event in Jewish history to be a root-experience is that it cannot be an isolated individual experience of Revelation that may legislate to isolated individuals in the future. At the Red Sea the whole people, the believers and the non-believers, saw what occurred; "not an opening of heaven but a transformation of earth—an historic event affecting decisively all future Jewish generations" [40] Future generations do not see the Presence of God, but to this day they recall twice daily in prayer and at Passover, the natural-historical event through which God was manifest. Thus its public, historical character makes it a root experience.

Fackenheim adds that there are two parts to the experience at the Red Sea, namely, impending disaster at the hands of the Egyptians and then salvation through the parting of the Red Sea and the Presence of God. Fackenheim explains, that later generations remember the natural-historical event, but they do not see what the Israelites

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[38] Ibid., p. 4
[39] Ibid., p. 9
[40] Ibid., p. 10

saw at that moment. According to Fackenheim, subsequent generations must have access to the vision of the Israelites; the Presence of God at the Red Sea. Without that access the event cannot be not a root experience. The memory of the miracle alone would make God a general and remote divine cause, and the events at the Red Sea would no longer be a true Revelation of the Divine Presence. But if the vision of the Israelites were still presently accessible then "in that case a Divine Presence, manifest in and through the past natural-historical event, could not fail to legislate to future generations." [41] This accessibility of the past experience to present generations is the third and crucial characteristic of a root experience in Judaism.

Fackenheim explains that the believing Jew remembering the Exodus and God's salvation at the Red Sea is not remembering events now over and done with, but as he reenacts the events, in his mind, they become a present reality. This assures him, that the God who saved the Israelites at the Red Sea, continues to have the power to save, and will ultimately bring salvation.

Fackenheim quotes Martin Buber's book *Moses,* to explain this further. In *Moses,* Buber explains; "...the children of Israel understood this as an act of their God, as a miracle; which does not mean they interpreted it as a miracle, but that they experienced it as such, that as such they perceived it..."[42] Revelation for Buber is the immediate experience of God. The miracle was experienced in the immediacy of the Revelation. Buber goes on to explain that a miracle that occurs in history brings abiding astonishment to those who witness it. He says that,

> Any causal explanation only deepens the wonder...
> The great turning points in religious history are based on

[41] Ibid., p. 11
[42] Buber, Martin, *Moses* (New York: Harper Torch Books, 1958) 75

> the fact that again and ever again an individual and a group attached to him wonder and keep on wondering; at a natural phenomenon, at an historical event, or both together; always at something which intervenes fatefully in the life of this individual and this group. They sense and experience it as a wonder.[43]

This, Buber goes on to say, is the starting point of the historical concept of wonder. A miracle is not "supernatural or super-historical." [44] It is an event that fits into the objective science of nature and history. But, to those who experience the event, what occurs is completely beyond their imagination and beyond the scope of their former knowledge of nature and history. In the astonishing experience of the event there is a glimpse into the "sphere in which a sole power, not restricted by any other, is at work." [45]

According to Fackenheim, Buber's explanation makes sense of a Divine Presence manifest through a natural-historical event, and explains how later generations have access to the experience of that Divine Presence. Fackenheim explains that the witnesses to the event do not infer God to explain the event. Any explanation would dilute the astonishment for those present, and subsequent believers would not be astonished at all if the event had a logical explanation. Thus, God is immediately present at the Red Sea, through the natural-historical event, astonishing the witnesses. The events at the Red Sea "intervene fatefully"[46] in the history of Israel.

Future generations of Jews reenact the abiding astonishment when they reenact the natural historical events at the Red Sea, thus making the astonishment their own. In this way the Revelation that occurred at the Red Sea becomes an ongoing Revelation. In this way, too, the God who was present then is still present, and "memory turns into faith

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[43] Ibid., p. 76
[44] Ibid., p. 76
[45] Ibid., p. 77
[46] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 11

and hope." [47] Thus, the event at the Red Sea will continue to be recalled and reenacted in Judaism and in that way the past legislates to the present and future.

At the Red Sea, God's Presence is a Saving Presence. At the Red Sea, salvation occurs within history, not in an eternity beyond it, and not as a messianic event that consummates history. It therefore is connected to human activity. In Exodus 14:15 Moses calls out to God, but is told to send his people forward. No salvation would have occurred had Israel been fearful and not entered the sea. Thus, the Israelites hear the Commanding Voice of God at the same moment that they see God's Saving Power. Yet, their salvation is not complete until the God's voice is obeyed. The astonishment of the Israelites at God's Saving Presence continues as God's voice is manifest to the Israelites.

Fackenheim goes on to say that in the root experience of Revelation at Sinai, when that same Voice comes on the scene as a Commanding Presence to legislate to future generations, the astonishment has a different structure. The difference, Fackenheim says, is that the astonishment at Sinai, because God's presence is a Commanding Presence, rather than a Saving Presence, turns to terror. In this case, at Sinai, there are two types of astonishment; first the Israelites are struck with fear, and then with joy "at a Grace which restores and exalts human freedom by its Commanding Presence." [48]

Fackenheim explains that the Jewish faith, which originated in the root experiences of a Saving and Commanding Divine Presence, is able to remain in a state of immediate openness to that Presence by reenacting those ancient root experiences throughout history. In that way Jewish faith remains open to the possibility of a Divine

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[47] Ibid., p. 11
[48] Ibid., p. 16

Presence even in times when the actual Revelation of that Presence is only a memory and a hope. Fackenheim says that a man continues to receive Torah when he authentically experiences and reenacts the root experience of Sinai. Thus, Revelation at Sinai becomes ongoing Revelation. As Fackenheim explains,

> According to the Midrash all generations of Israel were present at Sinai, and the Torah is given whenever a man receives it. (Midrash Tanhumah Yitro) A man can receive it only if he reenacts the double astonishment. If he remains frozen in stark terror, he cannot observe the commandments at all. And, if he evades that terror, he may observe the commandments, but he has lost the divine commanding Presence. Only by reenacting the both the terror and the joy can he participate in a life of the commandments which lives before the sole Power [God] and yet is human. [49]

Fackenheim is aware that philosophical reflection reveals contradictions that may either threaten the validity of, or even destroy these root experience. He says that three contradictions exist within the root experience. The first contradiction is between Divine Transcendence and Divine Involvement, the second is between Divine Power and human freedom, and the third is between God's involvement in history and the evil that exists within it.

Regarding philosophy Fackenheim says that, "Philosophical reflection, on becoming aware of these contradictions, is tempted to remove them, and to do so by means of a retrospective destruction of the root experiences themselves." [50] The ancient rabbis of the Midrash were also aware of these contradictions within the root experiences of Judaism, and sought to preserve these experiences instead, through the Midrash.

Fackenheim explains that to understand how this happened, we must first understand Jewish theological thought as it was when the Midrash was written.

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[49] Ibid., p. 16
[50] Ibid., p. 18

Jewish theological thought exhibits;

> A stubbornness which, soon adopted and rarely if ever abandoned, may be viewed as its defining characteristic. Negatively, this stubbornness consists of resisting all forms of thought which would remove the contradictions of the root experiences of Judaism at the price of destroying them. Positively, it consists of developing logical and literary forms which can preserve the root experiences of Judaism despite their contradictions. [51]

Fackenheim says that the Jewish theological thought in the Midrash resists a God who is the sole Power in the universe but who is not involved in history, and demands that those who worship Him withdraw themselves from history. According to Fackenheim, the Midrash insists that salvation occurs in history and that God's commandments are to be followed in history. Jewish theological thought also resists a God who overwhelms history, making no room for human freedom or evil, and manifests itself as Fate. Fatalism, Fackenheim says, would destroy the human freedom manifest at the Red Sea and at Sinai, and thus destroy the root experience itself. Finally, Fackenheim says that Jewish theological thought resists any idea of a God who is not sole Power. An Infinite God emphasizes a Messianic future in which evil is completely subdued by Divine Power and human freedom together, and in which Divine Power and human freedom are reconciled. "Meaning in history lies in its forward direction—one in which human freedom raises itself higher toward Divinity and evil comes closer to being conquered." [52]

Fackenheim explains that "This [messianic] future, a necessity for theological thought, is a necessity for immediate experience as well, and indeed rivals in significance

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[51] Ibid., p. 18
[52] Ibid., p. 5

the root experiences of the Red Sea and Sinai." [53] The messianic future cannot be a root experience in itself, because it is a future Jews wait for, rather than a past event reenacted. Nevertheless, Fackenheim says it is as essential to Jewish thought as are the root experiences of Sinai and the Red Sea. Without this anticipated future, the reenactment of the root experiences of Judaism would not be complete. Fackenheim explains further that the Jewish God of history must be capable of continued presence in history, and not only at its messianic end.

Jewish theological thought resists the dissipation of the root experiences of Judaism and attempts, rather, to preserve them. According to Fackenheim, it accomplishes this aim by becoming midrashic thought. Midrashic thinking considers the root experiences on a deeper level beyond their literal description, looking for the subtleties and incongruities within the root experience. In this way, midrashic thinking becomes aware of the contradictions within the root experiences. These are the same contradictions that philosophy might see, but unlike philosophy, midrashic thought refuses to destroy the experiences. Midrashic thinking also stands inside of the root experience to remain immediately at the Red Sea and at Sinai. Midrashic thought cannot resolve the contradictions in the root experiences of Judaism. It can only express the contradictions as Midrash, deliberately leaving the contradictions unresolved. Yet, Midrashic thought insists that these contradictions will ultimately be resolved in the messianic future.

According to Fackenheim, the Midrash is the best theology [54] ever produced and that radical surprise is best seen in the Midrash. Fackenheim further explains that

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[53] Ibid., p. 19

[54] Midrash is theology in the sense that it addresses itself to God and God's relation to the world.

Midrash is dialectical because it holds fast to contradictory positive assertions, which can only be thought of in the form of symbol and metaphor. For example, in Midrash we read that,

> Divine power transcends all things human-yet divine Love becomes involved with things human, and man, made a partner of God, can "as it were" augment or diminish divine power. Israel's election is a divinely imposed fate- and a free human choice. Man must wait for redemption as though all depended on God-and work for it as though all depended on man. The Messiah will come when all men are just-or all wicked. These affirmations must be held together unless thought is to lose either divine infinity or finite humanity, or the relation between them. They cannot be held together except in stories, parables and metaphors. [55]

Fackenheim explains that the Midrash gave Jews the ability to hold on to the root experiences of God's Presence in Jewish history. In the worst catastrophes the Midrash explained that God was with His people, suffering and weeping with them.

By explanations such as these the Midrash has protected and kept alive the root experiences of Jewish history. The Jewish people originated in the root experience of a Saving and Commanding Divine Presence. Jews continue to reenact these root experiences, holding on to the idea that even in catastrophic times the God who saved them once continues to save. Thus, God's Presence in the commandments has not been lost.

Jews carried the historical record of Divine Revelation in the Torah with them through thousands of years of exile. They remained faithful to their covenant with God through every turn of events. That was the power of a God present in history; a history preserved in Midrash and Torah.

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[55] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 16

According to Fackenheim, after Jewish emancipation, beginning in the late eighteenth century, modern Jews have stepped outside the midrashic framework and have continued, since Jewish emancipation, to call it into question. In pre-modern history there was one normative Jewish response to the root experiences in Judaism, but modern history has inspired a variety of Jewish responses. Since emancipation Jews have felt the need to come to terms with secularity, and to expose the root experiences of Judaism to secular criticism. This necessity is inspired by "the fact that, in modern times, the secular world is 'where the action is' and that a God of history must be where the action is." [56] This also exposes faith to the possibility that the Presence of God will be dissipated by a critical review of Divine Revelation. Nevertheless to avoid this self-exposure would mean, for the Jew, a retreat into the pre-modern ghetto. "If God is a God of history he must be a God of contemporary history also."[57]

Fackenheim says that faith and modern secularity do not confront each other on even terms. Although irrefutable, secularism, by virtue of its own self-understanding, can ignore faith. Modern Jewish faith cannot ignore secularism. Fackenheim says that; "Religious immediacy must expose itself to the threat of subjective reductionist reflection, and modern Jewish faith can authentically preserve the midrashic framework only after having stepped outside the frame work, thus calling it into question." [58] This is what Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish nineteenth century religious philosopher, called "immediacy after reflection"

Fackenheim illustrates "immediacy after refection" with the example of a modern Jew, beginning with the Passover celebration in his youth in which he affirms God's

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[56] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 46
[57] Ibid., p. 46
[58] Ibid., p. 47

Saving Presence at the Red Sea. This validates for him that the Saving God of the Exodus stills saves and will bring final redemption. As this modern Jew moves into adolescence, he is exposed to critical reflection which injects itself into his religious immediacy. He discovers that God's Presence is not a part of the historical data referred to in the Passover story. Psychological reflection regarding the data finds that God is neither necessary nor permissible. After he has been exposed to secular criticism, the man in our example doubts that there is any meaning in the modern celebration of Passover. But, in Kierkegaard's "immediacy after reflection" there is still a third and final stage of religious thought, in which the man will become critical of the criticism that secularity imposes on religious thought. He finally realizes that as a historian he is able to suspend judgment regarding the Passover story, but as a Jew, he cannot. He participates in the Seder now, not in his earlier religious immediacy which had never stepped outside the midrashic framework, nor in critical reflection which stands only outside looking in on the experience. He participates now in immediacy after reflection, in which he is, and remains, self-exposed to the possibility of a total loss of the Divine Presence, and yet, he confronts this possibility by reenacting the root experience of the Red Sea, and risking that he may again become committed to affirming the experience.

Fackenheim points out that the scenario in the preceding paragraph reflects, in part, what Buber meant by an "eclipse of God." Further, Fackenheim says, that although the metaphor is inspired by the biblical hiding of the Divine Face, it nevertheless points to the modern crisis in faith. After the Holocaust, modern Jewish faith has suffered a loss of innocence, and encounters the possibility that man is, in principle, is cut off from God. Thus, it is only by virtue of an unprecedented stubbornness that the modern Jewish

believer can be a witness, in and to the modern secular world, to God's Presence in history. Fackenheim adds that this testimony of faith is immediacy after reflection.

While secularism has been a threat to Jewish faith since the emancipation, a more serious threat exists in recent history, as Jewish faith must confront the recent events of the Holocaust. Fackenheim questions whether the Holocaust will destroy the faith that was born out of the root experiences in Jewish history. Even Buber's eclipse of God fails to sustain Jewish faith as it confronts the Nazi Holocaust. In the past, the possibility of the divine Presence remained the object of hope. For that reason the root experiences of the past could continue to be reenacted by Jews. After the Holocaust, as Elie Wiesel points out in *The Gates of the Forest*, a Messiah who can come and did not come at Auschwitz has become an impossibility.

According to Fackenheim, if the Messiah is totally and absolutely impossible, there are devastating consequences for Judaism. A Divine eclipse, that is not expected to end, would destroy both the Jewish past and the Jewish future. In all the previous catastrophes in Jewish history the possibility of Divine salvation remained present in the form of hope. If the current eclipse of God is total and unending, then all possible access to the God of history is lost and thus, the God of history Himself is totally lost.

The Midrashim that preserved Jewish faith through past catastrophes in Jewish history are of little use when faced with the magnitude of the Holocaust. In the Midrash, God goes into exile with his people, and returns with them. But from Auschwitz there can be no return. In the Midrash God was only, "as it were," powerless, but in Wiesel's *Night,* He is powerless. Fackenheim adds that Jewish faith after the Holocaust finds no refuge in the Midrashim of Divine powerlessness. In addition, the redeeming power of

martyrdom does not apply to the Holocaust because Jews at Auschwitz did not choose to die and their deaths cannot be considered an act of *kiddush ha Shem*. The idea that the Holocaust is the punishment for Jewish sin, Fackenheim says, is sacrilegious and appalling. The Midrashim of consolation helped the Jewish faith endure through epoch-making events before, but the tragedy of the Holocaust is a new kind of epoch-making event.

Fackenheim argues that Jews at Auschwitz were singled out for death, by a demonic power, as an end in itself. This was not the result of antisemitism or war or prejudice, but of a unique form of radical evil. Jewish theology still does not know how to respond to Auschwitz, and even Jewish secularism has no precedent through which to react. It is clear that it is impossible to understand why Auschwitz happened. The question, "Where was God at Auschwitz," cannot be answered and will never be answered. Nevertheless, in faithfulness to the principles of Judaism, we cannot disconnect God from the Holocaust.

Fackenheim adds that the Jew today both trembles and rejoices after Auschwitz. He trembles out of fear lest he may let any light in after Auschwitz by which to relieve the darkness of Auschwitz, and dishonor the victims. He rejoices so as not to add to the darkness of Auschwitz. Yet, in rejoicing after Auschwitz, a Jew bears witness to the world and prepares the way for God to return into the world. This, Fackenheim says, affirms that, "Jewish survival after Auschwitz is...a sacred testimony to all mankind that life and love, not death and hate, shall prevail" [59]

Fackenheim goes on to explain that, "Jews of this generation have been singled out by the Nazi Holocaust as Jews have not been singled out since the events at Mount

[59] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 96

Sinai." [60] Accordingly, it would make sense for any Jew to flee from this entirely horrendous singled out condition imposed upon him by the Holocaust. Fackenheim adds that logically after the Holocaust Jews should have used every way possible to disappear as Jews. He questions why anyone would want to risk having their children murdered again? In that case, Fackenheim says, "Who could stand one half of the world calling you vermin and trying to destroy you, and the other half of the world not giving much of a damn about it."[61] This statement reflects Fackenheim's view of what took place in the Holocaust and what he believes could happen again. After Auschwitz for any Jew to raise Jewish children is a monumental act of faithfulness to Judaism.

Nevertheless, Fackenheim asserts that the theologian should not be concerned with how to explain the Holocaust but, rather, with knowing how to live with it, and in whatever way he can, with finding God in it. Jewish secularism has been a possibility since the Age of Enlightenment. That it is alive is confirmed by the founding of a secular Jewish state. Secularism could be the fate of all Jews who continue to be Jews after the Holocaust. Yet, if this were actually the case, the Jewish response to the Holocaust would be the exact opposite of the one, which was, and is now, being given. Jews are not abandoning Judaism.

Instead of Jews abandoning their Judaism, just the opposite has happened. The Jewish community is committed to the survival of Judaism. According to Fackenheim, Jews throughout the world are responding to Auschwitz. Believer and nonbeliever, learned and unlearned, Jews have been responding to Auschwitz and continue to do so.

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[60] Ibid., p. 106

[61] Fackenheim, Emil L., "The Commandment to Hope." in *The Future of Hope*, ed. Walter H. Capps (Phiiadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) 88

Faced with the very real threat of extinction, Jews are "stubbornly defying it"[62] by, at the very least, committing themselves to the survival of themselves and their children as Jews. This is not a commitment to the vague loyalties or memories of past generations. Fackenheim explains that in the years after Auschwitz this is a new kind of commitment to Jewish survival, one which he describes as, "a monumental act of faithfulness, as well as a monumental, albeit fragmentary, act of faith."[63]

In addition, Fackenheim says that this commitment to Jewish survival transcends the usual distinctions between religious and secular Jew.

> Secularist, no less than religious Jews have responded with a reaffirmation of their Jewish existence such as no social scientist would ever have predicted, even if the Holocaust had never occurred. Jews themselves—rich and poor, learned and ignorant, believer and secularist—have responded in some measure all along. [64]

A Jew today can only oppose the demons of Auschwitz by committing himself to Jewish survival.

In this monumental determination on behalf of Jewish survival, Fackenheim has no doubt that the Commanding Voice of God is being heard.

> Jewish opposition to Auschwitz cannot be grasped in terms of humanly created ideals, but only as an imposed commandment. And the Jewish secularist, no less than the believer, is absolutely singled out by a Voice as truly other than man-made ideals —an imperative as truly given--as was the Voice of Sinai. [65]

Both secular and religious Jews who affirm their Jewishness are addressed together and "united by the commanding Voice of God, which speaks from Auschwitz." [66]

Fackenheim calls this the 614th commandment.

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[62] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Quest for Past and Future* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968) 19
[63] Ibid., p. 19
[64] Fackenheim, Emil L., *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970) 81
[65] Ibid., p. 83

This Voice, according to Fackenheim, commands that Jews are forbidden to give Hitler a posthumous victory. Jews are commanded to survive and to remember the victims of Auschwitz. Further, they are forbidden to despair of man and his world by escaping into cynicism or otherworldliness. Such escapes would turn the world over to the forces of evil. Finally, Jews are forbidden to despair of the God of Judaism because in that case Judaism itself would perish. This is what is being heard by Jews the world over; that Jews are forbidden to lose hope.

A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by co-operating in Jewish destruction. In ancient times the worst sin was idolatry; today it is doing Hitler's work. "The commanding Voice of Auschwitz singles Jews out; Jewish survival is a commandment which brooks no compromise. In May 1967 Jews heard the commanding voice of Auschwitz." [67] Fackenheim explains that when the Commanding Voice of God was heard by Israelis in May 1967, they refused to lie down and be slaughtered. The Voice Commands that, after Auschwitz, Jewish life is more valuable than Jewish death.

Fackenheim adds that the religious Jew who hears the Voice of Sinai must continue to listen as he hears the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz.; the secularist Jew, however, who has lost Sinai and now hears the Voice of Auschwitz, is forbidden to turn the Voice of Auschwitz against the Voice of Sinai.

One may wonder at where Jewish strength to survive has come from in the twenty-five years since the Holocaust. The Jewish faith has not disappeared. Instead Jews have had the strength to endure and to affirm their Judaism. Jews bear witness against the demonic forces of evil in the world. Fackenheim says that this Jewish

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[66] Ibid., p. 84
[67] Ibid., p. 86

strength produces an abiding wonder, that is, wonder at the commanding Voice of God without which Judaism would have perished.

Fackenheim does not explicitly call this Commanding Voice of God an event of Revelation. The Jewish people are addressed by God, but they are not gathered together, as at the Red Sea and at Sinai, when God addresses them. Yet, looking back at Fackenheim's understanding of Revelation, there are some obvious similarities. God's commandment is being heard by those open to faith, and in recognizing it as the Voice of God, there is immediacy in the experience. Those who do not hold themselves open to faith do not hear God in the commandment, but, still recognize that they are commanded. At the Red Sea the Israelites both saw and heard God, and God's Presence was both a Saving and Commanding Presence. At Sinai only the Commanding Voice of God was heard. Yet, in all three cases the Voice was interpreted as a call to action. There was, and is, abiding wonder at the military victory of Israel in "the Six Day War," and at the strength and endurance of the Jewish people since the since the Holocaust. Finally, in view of Fackenheim's new understanding that the content of Revelation begins with "He spoke," the commanding Voice from Auschwitz speaks.

Fackenheim does not call the contemporary experience of the Commanding Voice of God a root experience in Judaism. If we consider the conditions for an event in Jewish history to be a root experience, we can easily see why. Jews hearing this commandment, hear it in the present. It is not a past experience that legislates to the present, but a present experience that legislates to the present. The Commanding Voice of God speaks to individuals, but it affects both current and future generations of Jews. There is not an experience of God's Presence that can be reenacted in hope or celebration, as is possible

with the root experiences of Sinai and the Red Sea. Yet, we celebrate Jewish determination and hope on *Yom Ha'atzmaut*, the anniversary of the day that Israel became an independent State. Moreover, *Yom Ha'atzmaut* is the day after *Yom Ha'Shoah*, the day when the victims of the Holocaust are remembered. In Israel the *Yom Ha'Shoah* ceremony at *Yad'va'Shem* includes several testimonies from those who escaped from, or survived, the Nazis death camps. In a sense, these Jews are fulfilling God's commandment that Jews and Judaism must survive after the Holocaust.

Fackenheim goes on to say that those who saw the Presence of God at the Red Sea and heard God's Voice at Sinai found themselves to be witnesses to all the nations. This meant that they felt themselves obligated to tell others that the Jewish God is a Saving God, that His commandments are universal, and to declare idolatry forbidden. Still, Israel did not dissolve among the nations precisely because they were the singled out to become witnesses. Now, after Auschwitz, the world is becoming more and more a hopeless and increasingly desperate place. The war in Viet Nam rages on, Soviet Jews are persecuted in the Soviet Union, and starvation is rampant in Africa. Nevertheless Fackenheim explains that,

> The Jew after Auschwitz is a witness to endurance. He is singled out by contradictions which, in our post-Holocaust world, are worldwide contradictions. He bears witness that without endurance we shall all perish. He bears witness that we can endure because we must endure; and that we must endure because we are commanded to endure. [68]

Whether we realize it or not, according to Fackenheim, we have made a collective commitment to endure the contradictions of present Jewish existence. Fackenheim explains that;

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[68] Ibid., p. 95

> If we are capable of this endurance, then the faith implicit in it may well be of historic consequence. At least twice before—at the time of the destruction of the First and of the Second Temple—Jewish endurance in the midst of catastrophe helped transform the world. We cannot know the future, if only because the present is without precedent. But this ignorance on our part can have no effect on our present action. The uncertainty of what will be may not shake our certainty of what we must do. [69]

Remarkably, Auschwitz did not destroy the Jewish longing for salvation. When Jerusalem in 1967 went from the threat of annihilation to salvation at winning the war, it was because of Auschwitz, not in spite of it, that there was radical amazement. Nothing of the past was explained or adjusted; no fears for the future were stilled. Yet the very clash between Auschwitz and Jerusalem produced a moment of truth and wonder at a singled out, millennial existence which, after Auschwitz, is still possible and actual. The Jews must carry the past forward into an unknown future.

Fackenheim says that two events have happened to the Jewish people in this generation that are more momentous than the fall of Jerusalem in 70CE ever was. The rabbis then confronted the possibility that the Jewish people might die. At Auschwitz this people in fact died. The rabbis dreamt of salvation and resurrection after catastrophe. That salvation and resurrection finally became actual in Jerusalem in the spring of 1967.

Jewish existence today continues to live both the events of Auschwitz and Jerusalem. Old midrashim are beginning to take on new meaning as Jews search for ways to understand the world after Auschwitz. And, the stories of the Holocaust are finally being told. As a result, new midrashim are being created. Fackenheim relates a personal story, in which there is an example of a new Midrash.

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[69] "Jewish Values in the Post Holocaust Future: A Symposium." Judaism Vol. 16, No.3, Summer 1967: 173

> I went with a group survivors on a pilgrimage to the
> murder camp of Bergen-Belsen—and then to Jerusalem.
> When we arrived at Hanover, the city nearest to Belsen,
> it rained. The leader of our group told us: 'We have
> revisited this place of our suffering many times.
> It always rains. God weeps. He weeps for the sins
> he has committed against his people Israel. [70]

We have already seen changes in Fackenheim's thought as a result of coming face to face, honestly and publicly with the Holocaust. The Holocaust will always be central to Fackenheim's thought. As his thought evolves, over the next twenty years, his concept of revelation will evolve as well. In the years after 1981 until his death in 2003, Israel becomes increasingly significant in Fackenheim's life and thought. It is during this period that Fackenheim and his family move to Israel. We will see in the next chapter that in this third and final phase of his work, Fackenheim's theological thought grows even more complex.

[70] Fackenheim, Emil L., *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978) 125

Chapter 3

The Later Years: 1982-2003

Throughout the later years of his writing, Fackenheim continues to wrestle with the implications of the Holocaust. In the first half of his major work during his later years, *To Mend the World*, Fackenheim looks for answers by exposing his view of Revelation in Judaism to philosophy. He systematically confronts the views of Spinoza, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Marx, but is unable to find the answers he is looking for. In the chapter "The Shibboleth of Revelation: From Spinoza Beyond Hegel" Fackenheim examines these views completely and intently. In the end, Fackenheim is sure that philosophy and Revelation in Judaism share no common ground. It is only at this point that Fackenheim changes the focus of his writing.

The focus of Fackenheim's writing in this later years, then, becomes the impact of the Holocaust on post-Holocaust generations of Jews, and how that will affect the future of Judaism. After expressing his worst fear, namely that the Judaism of the future will not include the Jewish God of Revelation, Fackenheim moves on in a sustained attempt to find a basis from which to begin the process of reconnecting post-Holocaust Jews and the God of Revelation.

In *To Mend the World* Fackenheim reiterates his lasting commitment is to his Jewish faith. Fackenheim explains;

> By 'Jewish faith' I understand now, as I did then,
> a commitment to revelation: and by 'revelation'
> I understand now, as I did then, not propositions
> or laws backed by Divine sanction, but rather, at

least primordially, the event of divine Presence.[1]

For Fackenheim Jewish faith includes openness to Revelation and a commitment to the God of Revelation.

Fackenheim reminds us that Judaism began with Divine Revelation, as experienced in the root experiences of God's Saving Presence at the Red Sea and God's Commanding Presence at Sinai. The concept of Divine Revelation as both the Commanding and the Saving Presence of God did not become a part of Fackenheim's written thought until after 1966.

In the early years of his writing, before 1966, Fackenheim wrote only about God's Commanding Presence at Mount Sinai as the origins of the Jewish people. Three months after the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they experienced God's Presence in the wilderness of Sinai. According to Fackenheim, the Israelites, upon accepting the Divine Commanding Presence, entered into a covenantal relationship with God. The Israelites accepted the Divine Presence and agreed to obey God's Law, which they interpreted as a "call to action." Revelation at Sinai, in the form of the Commanding Presence of God, during the early years for Fackenheim, formed the foundation upon which Judaism and the Jewish people began.

During the middle years of his writing on Revelation, Fackenheim began to write about another event of Revelation in Judaism. He writes that God had also been manifest to the Israelites as a Saving Presence at the Red Sea. Fackenheim explains that before the event of Revelation at Sinai, God's Saving Presence was manifest to the Israelites at the Red Sea. In the events that took place at the Red Sea, as the sea parted allowing the Israelites to cross in safety and to escape their Egyptian aggressors, the Israelites

[1] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Shocken Books, 1982) 6

witnessed the Saving Presence of God. Fackenheim added that had it not been for God's Saving Presence at the Red Sea, the Commanding Presence at Sinai could not have happened. This leads Fackenheim to the conclusions that God reveals Himself in Judaism as both a Saving and Commanding God. Both of these experiences of Revelation in Judaism were recorded by the ancients in the Torah. In the biblical account of the Exodus the event of God's Saving Presence precedes the event of God's Commanding Presence.

According to Fackenheim, Judaism has been sustained by re-reading, re-enacting and re-experiencing both of these moments of God's Presence. Throughout its long and difficult history, Jews have followed God's Law and held on to the belief that the God who saved the Israelites at the Red Sea would return to redeem them. According to Fackenheim, Jews believed "that exile, while it lasts, must be patiently endured, and that its end is a secret in the keeping of God."[2] Fackenheim adds that the two root experiences recorded in the Torah are not the only examples of Revelation in Judaism. He says that, from the Hebrew Bible, Jews understood that "The God who saved once has saved again and again, in events celebrated on Purim, Hanukkah, and other occasions; and the Torah that was given at Sinai is given also whenever a person receives it." [3]

However, Fackenheim is aware that, after Auschwitz, it is difficult for Jews to speak of a Saving God, who did not save the six-million innocent victims of the Holocaust. Fackenheim argues that, there is no theological explanation of the Holocaust; we do not, and cannot, understand why or even if, God allowed Auschwitz to happen. The Holocaust is completely void of meaning and explanation. The enormity of the

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[2] Ibid., p. 17
[3] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Modern Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 285

tragedy dismisses all classical explanations of suffering. Yet, despite all of this, Fackenheim insists that belief in the Divine Presence is possible after the Holocaust and that it is essential to the future of Jewish faith after the Holocaust.

Fackenheim says that today, after Auschwitz, the Presence of God is the most difficult part of Judaism for post-Holocaust generations of Jews to recover and affirm. Fackenheim continues to ask the questions that Buber asked in his lecture, "The Dialogue Between Heaven and Earth," originally delivered in 1951:

> How is a life with God still possible in a time in which there is an Auschwitz...One can still believe in a God who allowed those things to happen, but how can one still speak to Him? Can one still hear His word? ...can one still call on Him? Dare we recommend to the survivors of Auschwitz, the Job of the gas chambers: Call on Him, for He is kind, for His mercy endureth forever? [4]

Yet, if post-Holocaust Judaism is to be lasting, it must be authentic Judaism. In light of this, Fackenheim says that, after the Holocaust, keeping the Jewish God of Revelation and the Jewish people together is imperative. The problem for Fackenheim is how to accomplish this. Enormous events have happened that generations of Jews after the Holocaust must face and include as they struggle with the Jewish God. Because of Auschwitz, an abyss, a total rupture, has occurred between the biblical God of Revelation and post-Holocaust generations of Jews. It is this that Fackenheim seeks to build a bridge over.

Fackenheim's initial response, as Jews began to face the events of the Holocaust was the 614th Commandment; the imperative that Jews not give Hitler a posthumous victory. Fackenheim says that when he formulated the 614th Commandment and wrote about it in 1967, he had not yet considered all of the issues facing post-Holocaust Jews,

[4] Ibid., p. 196

nor had he fully immersed himself in the darkness of the Holocaust. Fackenheim's observation that, although unable to comprehend the Holocaust, Jews were defiantly continuing to live Jewish lives and raise their children as Jews, was the inspiration for the 614th Commandment. Later, upon further reflection, Fackenheim says that the 614th Commandment is inadequate. Although the necessity to deny Hitler a posthumous victory remains a moral and religious necessity, it is a more difficult and complicated task for post-Holocaust Jews, than Fackenheim first understood it to be. A generation later Fackenheim wrote "The 614th Commandment Reconsidered,"[5] in which he reevaluated how each of the four parts of the 614th Commandment would apply today. Fackenheim reexamined each part of the commandment individually.

1. "Jews are bidden to survive, even if unable to believe in a higher purpose." [6] Fackenheim says that Judaism can not exist without Jews and he now wonders if, Jews and Judaism will always exist. Judaism may either survive the Holocaust fundamentally as it was, or else, if not destroyed, it may be altered beyond recognition. Fackenheim tells us that Rosenzweig believed that regardless of the perpetual attrition in Judaism, caused by pogroms, assimilation, and childlessness, a Jewish remnant, for the most part unchanged by the catastrophe, will always survive, "to witness its mission—to Eternity."[7] But, Fackenheim points out that Rosenzweig was unaware of the Holocaust. Today, according to Fackenheim, theology must think in new ways about the Jewish future.

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[5] Fackenheim, Emil L., *Jewish Philosophers and Jewish Philosophy*, Ed. Michael Morgan (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996) 193
[6] Ibid., p. 193
[7] Ibid., p. 193

"Having once been a fact, a Holocaust is known to be a possibility; precariousness therefore attaches henceforth to Jewish survival—and also to Judaism." [8]

2. "Jews are bidden to remember, even though thereby compelled to wrestle with the threat that Auschwitz poses to Sinai." [9] Fackenheim points out that, because there are fewer Holocaust survivors left in the world now, we no longer have direct access to the searing experience of the Holocaust. Therefore, as the intensity of the experience fades, reflective thought becomes extremely important. Fackenheim explains that for the first 20 years after the Holocaust the world was so stunned by what had taken place that historians dealt with the Holocaust only in footnotes, and philosophers dealt with it as "evil in general...[or] the demonic in general"[10] Now, as the Holocaust is publicly discussed, the more unfathomable it becomes. Historians ask why the criminals did it, while theologians ask how to respond to the fate of the victims. The questions become more disconcerting as time passes. Fackenheim quotes Buber when he said that a miracle "is an event that the more it is explained, the more astonishing it becomes."[11] Among believers a miracle evokes a lasting sense of wonder. Antithetical to this, Fackenheim says is that the Holocaust is an anti-miracle, because it evokes a lasting sense of horror.

3. "Jews are forbidden to despair of mankind, even after the one time division of the world, with all too few exceptions, into the perpetrators and the indifferent, when at the same time the crime of the Holocaust was unique, and the indifference, very nearly so."[12] Hitler carried out a brutal attack on "the divine image in humanity." The belief that man was created in the Divine image begins in the Jewish Bible, and is fundamental in

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[8] Ibid., p. 193
[9] Ibid., p. 193
[10] Ibid., p. 194
[11] Ibid., p. 194
[12] Ibid., p. 194

Judaism. To honor and respect the victims of the Holocaust, Fackenheim says that; post-Holocaust Jews, "even if unable to believe in God...are commanded to rebuild the belief that humanity—every member of it—is created in the Divine image."[13]

4. Jews are forbidden to deny God, even though having to contend with the Divine in ways without precedent in the entire, four millennial life with God."[14] Fackenheim says that survivors tell us, that in the Holocaust, in addition to Jews, Jewish hope died. Without hope, Fackenheim asks, how can Jews bring up Jewish children and how a new page in Jewish history that begins with the State of Israel, can be opened. The answer for Fackenheim is that "Whenever Jews bring up Jewish children, and whenever they take actions that help secure the Jewish State and make it flourish, the agents even if unaware of the fact, participates in the resurrection of the hope that died."[15] The question that remains is how this hope can help this generation of Jews reconnect to the Jewish God of hope? Fackenheim says that; "This question is a task still ahead, perhaps for a generation yet unborn."[16]

Modern theologians try to solve the problem of reconnecting post-Holocaust Jews with the God of Judaism by offering new explanations of God. One explanation describes a God who can inspire His people, but cannot save them. According to Fackenheim, this is not a Jewish God. Fackenheim asks, in this case, "What would remain of psalms when addressed to a God that cannot save?"[17] And, what of the root-experience of God's saving Power at the Red Sea? This God is not, and cannot be, the God of Judaism.

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[13] Ibid., p. 194
[14] Ibid., p. 193
[15] Ibid., p. 193
[16] Ibid., p. 194
[17] Ibid., p. 194

Fackenheim says that "Holocaust Theology," in its effort to solve the problem, has been moving in two opposite directions. On the one hand, there is a belief that, although deeply shaken by the Holocaust, Judaism has not been altered as a result, [18] and on the other hand, there exists a "God-is dead"[19] kind of despair. Fackenheim disagrees with both, and argues that "If the former alternative blasphemes against Hitler's victims, the later blasphemes against the God of the victims. Both the victims and God have to be held together in dialectical tension after Auschwitz; neither can be devalued without resulting in distortion and loss of truth"[20]

Judaism survived the destruction of the Second Temple, a true catastrophe in its own right. That catastrophe was compounded by Rome's subsequent crushing of the Bar Kochba rebellion, and an exile from Judea that left no end in sight. Fackenheim says that whether or not Judaism would survive that catastrophe was not known until a response was found in Rabbinic Judaism. Whether or not Judaism can survive the vastly greater catastrophe of the Holocaust, also cannot be known before a post-Holocaust Judaism comes to exist.

According to Fackenheim, the central problem confronting Jews after the Holocaust is their relationship as modern Jews to the recent Jewish past and to Jewish tradition. Can the bond with past Jewish tradition and God be recovered after the Holocaust? Fackenheim believes that without a recovered Jewish tradition, there cannot be a Jewish future. According to Fackenheim, the recovered Jewish tradition for the

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[18] Fackenheim is referring to the post -Holocaust thought of Eliezer Berkowitz in *With God in Hell* (New York: Sanhedrin, 1979) and *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973)
[19] Fackenheim is referring to the post Holocaust thought of Richard Rubenstein in *After the Holocaust* (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966)
[20]Katz, Steven, "Jewish Faith after the Holocaust" *Encyclopedia Judaica CD-ROM Edition* (Israel: Judaica Multimedia, 1997) key word "Fackenheim"

religious Jew is the Word of God, and for the secular Jew "the word of man and his 'divine spark'" [21] The religious Jew seeks to trust God again and the secular Jew seeks to trust humanity again.

The task, according to Fackenheim, is to recover what is meaningful for Jews after the Holocaust, from the traditional Jewish view of Revelation. The ancient tradition itself is no longer authoritative for post-Holocaust Jews. Fackenheim says that in pre-modern times the traditional view of Revelation at Sinai rested on the authority of the six-hundred thousand Israelites present at Sinai and an unbroken chain of trustworthy witnesses. "His [the pre-modern Jew's] modern heirs (who are bereft of authorities) must reach out from the present for the past, in an attempt to recover it; but they can recover revelation in that past only if it is not only a past fact but also, potentially, a present experience."[22] This is not a new idea in Judaism. Leo Strauss's has already said, "What is this, to grant to science and history whatever they teach...and yet not to be compelled to give up one iota of the substance of Judaism? It is to give that 'substance' a new foundation, namely, personal commitment instead of authority." [23]

But, with no authority or access to a past truth about Judaism that modern Jews can accept, Fackenheim says that Revelation in Judaism must be a present experience if it is to be recovered. Fackenheim adds that for Jews after the Holocaust, any commitment to the God of Revelation must be a personal commitment out of personal experience. Yet, Fackenheim observes that after the Holocaust, Jewish believing openness may no longer be one of trusting expectation. Without trust and a believing openness to the

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[21] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 310
[22] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 28
[23] Ibid., p. 26

possibility of Revelation, Fackenheim says that post-Holocaust Jews cannot recover the God of Revelation.

According to Fackenheim, this has resulted in the break or rupture between post-Holocaust Jews and God that he spoke of before. Fackenheim adds that this rupture poses a very a serious problem for the future of Judaism and that if there is to be a Jewish future this rupture must be overcome. Post-Holocaust Jews must find a way to recover and recommit themselves to the ancient God of Revelation within their present reality.

As a way to solve this current problem of the rupture or break that now exists between post-Holocaust Jews and God, Fackenheim turns to the Jewish concepts of *Teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is an age old concepts in Judaism. Fackenheim explains that,

> *Teshuvah* in Judaism is a many sided experience. Its core however is a divine-human turning-toward-each-other, despite and indeed because of their persistent and unmitigated incommensurability. This is...the central experience of Sinai. It is also the experience of countless generations that, alienated from the God of Sinai, found themselves ever turning, and ever being turned back to Him. [24]

The focus of the second half of *To Mend the World* is *Teshuvah* for the Jewish people, in our time. Fackenheim points out that, earlier in Jewish history, whenever catastrophe produced, or came close to producing, a rupture between the Jewish people and their God, *Teshuvah*, although difficult, was possible. The Jewish people, while often without peace, always had a vibrant life because of the "ever-renewing, ever-rejuvenating power of Teshuvah."[25]

The biblical book of Lamentations confronts the double catastrophe of the ruthless destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem with *Teshuvah*.

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[24] Ibid., p. 141
[25] Ibid., p. 318

According to Fackenheim, *Teshuvah* was the only Jewish alternative to despair. Teshuvah allowed the Jewish people to turn once again to the God of Revelation, and to believe that this God still had the power to Save and Command them. Thus, in the past, *Teshuvah* could help overcome despair for the Jews in situations that seemed desperate and devoid of God. *Teshuvah* helped Jews rediscover and have faith in the ancient God of Revelation, after catastrophes in the Jewish past.

This dynamic is illustrated in the traditional liturgy for *Tisha b'Av*. The biblical book of Lamentations is traditionally read in the synagogue on *Tisha b'Av*. Lamentations ends with a stark question directed to God; "Have you utterly rejected us? Are you angry with us beyond measure?" [26] Yet, at the end of the liturgical reading of the last verse of the book in the synagogue, the second to last verse; "Turn us unto You, God, and we shall be turned. Renew our days as of old"[27] is repeated. In other words, according to Fackenheim, this prayer is a petition asking God to do His part in the *Teshuvah* of their returning to God. *Teshuvah* requires that both God and man work together if it is to be successful. Thus, the reading and the prayer on *Tisha b'Av* ends on the hopeful note that *Teshuvah* will be accomplished. This prayer continues to be repeated, by Jews, whenever the Torah is returned to the ark in the synagogue after being read. *Teshuvah* is a constant undercurrent in Jewish belief.

Fackenheim says that *Yom ha' Shoah*, the day dedicated to mourning the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, is not at all like *Tisha b'Av*, the day Jews mourn the destruction of Jerusalem. *Tisha b'Av* is the day of mourning for catastrophes that are punishment for Jewish sins. Jews vicariously atone, on *Tisha b'Av*, for the sins of others, who, in our

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[26] Lamentations 5:22
[27] Lamentations 5:21

ancient past, disobeyed Divine decrees and brought God's punishment upon all Jews. This is not the understanding of Yom ha Shoah. During the Holocaust innocent people were singled out and murdered. *Yom ha' Shoah* commemorates innocent Jewish suffering, not Jewish sin.

"Throughout the ages *Teshuvah* has been the source of Jewish fidelity and Jewish renewal. It has been the innermost source of Jewish survival." [28] Even in catastrophe, Jews have ultimately been able to pray that God would once again metaphorically turn to face them, and in so doing, turn those Jews who had survived the catastrophe, back towards God. Fackenheim says that this dialectic of turning and being turned has been the stance of Jewish thought toward all past Jewish catastrophes. It would have been the stance toward all future catastrophes as well, had it not been for the Holocaust. A small surviving group of Jews, a remnant, had always turned and returned to God. According to Jewish belief, a remnant will always remain and Fackenheim says that, "It is this remnant that stands between the threat of rupture and rupture itself." [29]

After all previous catastrophes, since biblical times, a Jew could understand himself as being part of a holy remnant. This did not mean that his generation was holy, but rather that his generation was heir to the "holy ones." [30] Heir, not to the many victims of the catastrophe, but rather to the few who, whether in life or in death as martyrs, had remained faithful to their Judaism. Now, after the Holocaust and in light of it, Fackenheim questions whether this time a remnant will return to God as before.

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[28] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 58
[29] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 251
[30] Ibid., p. 309

The post-Holocaust generation is a remnant unlike any other before in Judaism. Fackenheim explains that after the Holocaust Jews are not heir to the few, as was the case after past catastrophes, but, "to the whole [all of the] murdered people." [31] Except for an accident, this generation of Jews would either have been murdered, or never have been born. In that sense, Fackenheim says that, "We are an accidental remnant." [32] We are a holy remnant in the sense that, according to Maimonides, anyone who is murdered only because he is a Jew, is to be considered holy. Thus, all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust are considered ***kedoshim***, "holy ones." Fackenheim explains; "Only in this and no other sense are we, the accidental remnant, also a holy remnant. In this sense, however, our holiness is ineluctable and brooks no honest escape or refusal." [33]

According to Fackenheim, this places Jews today in a unique and unbearable situation; a situation "so extreme, so unprecedented, so full of anguish, as to seem tear us in two." [34] We are heir to an innocent people murdered with such cruelty that we can still hear "the cry of an innocence that shakes heaven and earth; that can never be stilled; that overwhelms our hopes, our prayers, our thought."[35] How, then, in this situation, can a post-Holocaust Jew turn and return to the God of Revelation in his effort to rediscover the Saving Presence of God at the Red Sea? It is no wonder that the post-Holocaust Jew cannot believe in the traditional God of Revelation. This, according to Fackenheim, reflects the severity of the rupture between post-Holocaust Jews and the traditional God of Revelation.

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[31] Ibid., p. 308
[32] Ibid., p. 308
[33] Ibid., p. 309
[34] Ibid., p. 309
[35] Ibid., p. 309

Fackenheim says that the problem after the Holocaust is so radical and inescapable, because the rupture with God after the Holocaust is so complete, that *Teshuvah* has to assume the form of *Tikkun,* or repair, if the rupture is to be overcome. *Tikkun* is a form of *Teshuvah* in response to the most extreme separation of the Jewish people from their God. To explain *Tikkun*, Fackenheim begins with the following midrash.

> The night is divided into three watches, and in each watch sits the Holy One, blessed be He, and roars like a lion: "Woe unto Me that I have destroyed My house and burned My temple and sent My children into exile among the nations.[36]

Fackenheim explains that, if the midrash tells us that God weeps because of what has taken place, then God has not stopped caring about the Jewish people and has not abandoned them. Then, we, too, can weep with God, now that we know that God weeps because of what has taken place. And, "these two laments—His and ours—reflect [that there has been] a rupture," [37] Both the Divine and the human weeping together, then, is a *Tikkun*; "a mending of what is broken." [38]

Fackenheim is well aware that normative Judaism has traditionally been uncomfortable with the assertion that these anthropomorphic descriptions of God are actual or ontological. Fackenheim is also aware that the symbolic nature of the Midrash does not capture the reality and the depth of the Holocaust. In addition, this midrash addresses the particular situation of Tikkun after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the Jewish exile from Judea. It does not address what Fackenheim believes

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[36] Ibid., p. 252
[37] Ibid., p. 252
[38] Ibid., p. 252

is the even greater rupture between God and the Jewish people after the Holocaust. He explains that,

> Historical catastrophe is real. So is the divine involvement in it. However, the Midrash does not presume to penetrate the divine nature but is rather a human, metaphorical way of speaking. God only 'as it were' weeps...The midrashic symbolism does not claim to have an ontological reference. [39]

Nevertheless, Fackenheim continues to assert that post-Holocaust Jews must find a paradigm in Jewish thought that will allow them to reunite with the God of Revelation. It is in this effort that Fackenheim looks to Kabbalah. Although Fackenheim's interest in Kabbalah has only recently become serious, he turns to Kabbalistic symbolism. Fackenheim explains that;

> [My] lifelong love affair with Midrash, evident on nearly every page of this book, reaches its ultimate expression, even as it compels me to confess to a life-long prejudice. It is against Kabbala. It is...a lifelong feeling that Kabbala rushes in where Midrash fears to tread...Only in recent years did Kabbala arouse a deeper interest in me, and this on the grounds that sometimes, perhaps, one must.[40]

Kabbalistic Judaism, Fackenheim says, searches for a truth beyond the midrashic symbolism. Kabbalistic symbolism clearly sees the transparent reality in the situation of a rupture with the Divine, such as exists after the Holocaust. Fackenheim gives an example from the Kabbalah that better expresses the situation after the Holocaust.

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[39] Ibid., p. 253

[40] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 285

> The vessels are broken. The Shekhina is in exile." God Himself is in a state of Tzimtzum [41]—a "retreat from the world"—without which the very being of the world would be impossible. These and similar symbols go in their reference beyond rupture in history, to a rupture of cosmic dimensions that involves no less than the "life and action' of Divinity itself. [42]

Fackenheim explains that the exile of the Shekhina and the fracture of the vessels refer to cosmic as well as historical realities. For post-Holocaust Jews, the *Shekhina*, or God's Presence in the world, can no longer be found after the horrific events of the Holocaust. The broken vessels represent Jews after the Holocaust whose faith in God is shattered.

This loss of faith is the rupture that our *Tikkun* must mend. The question is how we can participate in healing our own state of brokenness. According to Fackenheim, while post-Holocaust Jews cannot overcome their break from God alone, they can, and must, participate in the healing of it. Fackenheim adds that a rupture that is this total requires "that all powers must be summoned for a mending."[43] In a rupture such as this, human power must combine with Divine Power. Human power must aid the Divine, and Divine Power must aid human power. Thus, according to Fackenheim, both God and man must participate in *Tikkun* after the Holocaust.

Yet, Fackenheim is not sure if even with God's help, *Tikkun* can mend the current rupture between God and His people. According to Fackenheim, the problems for post-Holocaust generations are so fundamental and unavoidable, with a rupture that is so complete, that a *Tikkun* of it can only, at best, be fragmentary or partial, if it is possible at

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[41] Fackenheim explains that being Infinite God had to exercise Tzimtzum, make Himself smaller, so that room would be left in which He could create the world. Fackenheim argues that if this is only meant metaphorically, it is within the bounds of midrashic thinking. But if it is meant to go beyond metaphor, it implies that God cannot enter the world, lest He destroy it. But, in Fackenheim's understanding of revelation, God can and has entered the world.

[42] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 253

[43] Ibid., p. 253

all. Fackenheim says that it is God's Saving Power that is needed for *Tikkun* after the Holocaust. The Saving God of the Red Sea must first be recovered by post-Holocaust Jews, if their rupture with God is to be overcome. Only then, can post-Holocaust Jews recover the Commanding God of Sinai. Thus, for now, a Tikkun can only be fragmentary. It is important to remember that Fackenheim has already made the point that had it not been for God's Saving Presence at the Red Sea, the Israelites would not have survived to stand at Sinai.

Fackenheim says that in light of prior catastrophes there was a possible *Tikkun*, or mending, that allowed Jews to return to their God. But, in attempting to confront the Holocaust, Jews confront a rupture of the Jewish people from God like no other before. Fackenheim adds that the Jewish symbol of *Tikkun*, in any of its previous uses, does not help us, in light of this current rupture.

Fackenheim says that any post-Holocaust *Tikkun* will be a very difficult and slow process, if it is possible at all. The rupture between post-Holocaust Jews and their God can only be healed slowly, as one recuperates from an illness. Thus, the post-Holocaust *Tikkun*, on which the Jewish future depends, will remain incomplete and precarious for some time.

According to Fackenheim, Jews today are situated in a post-Holocaust world from which there is no legitimate escape. To the historian or the philosopher, the Holocaust may already be past facts to be analyzed, but authentic Jews are affected by the Holocaust morally, religiously, philosophically and humanly. They are unable to minimize, ignore, or overcome the darkness that is the Holocaust. Fackenheim explains that for Jews, both God and humanity are called into question by the Holocaust, and he asks; "Shall we trust

in God because we—though not they—were spared? Shall we trust in man because here and now—though not then and there—he bears traces of humanity?"[44] For a Jew after the Holocaust, the irrepressible questions are painful and unthinkable, and the rupture that is a result of this catastrophe is undeniable.

In the Holocaust bodies and souls were indiscriminately murdered. A level of evil, thought impossible in human nature, became possible and actual in the singular cruelty and dehumanization of the Nazi's systematic plan to rid the world of Jews. "The Jewish thinker considers the choiceless children: their helpless mothers; and finally—the achievement most revelatory of the essence of the whole Nazi world—the *Muselmanner*, these latter once free persons, and then dead while still alive." [45] Fackenheim explains, in a paraphrase of Elie Wiesel; "'At Auschwitz not only man died, but also the idea of man'; because 'our estrangement from God' has become so 'cruel' that even if He were to speak to us, we have no way of understanding how to 'recognize Him.'" [46]

It is not surprising, then, that Fackenheim fears that a *Tikkun* of that rupture is not possible. According to Fackenheim, if a *Tikkun* of that rupture is truly not possible, Jews cannot live after the Holocaust as Jews have lived before, and perhaps they cannot live as Jews at all. Thus, Fackenheim says that the impossible *Tikkun* is necessary because,

> It is unthinkable that the age old fidelity of the religious Jews, having persisted through countless persecutions and against impossible odds...should be destroyed forever. It is unthinkable that the far less ancient, no less noble fidelity of a secular Jew—he holds fast not to God, but to the 'divine spark in man'—should be smashed beyond repair. [47]

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[44] Ibid., p., 297
[45] Ibid., p. 298
[46] Fackenheim, Emil l., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 258, in Elie Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Avon, 1968) 230
[47] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 299

Fackenheim poses another question on which he says the future of Judaism depends; "After the Holocaust, can the Yom Kippur be what it was before? Is it still possible?" [48] In other words, can Jews after the Holocaust still speak to the God of Revelation? According to Fackenheim, during 2000 years of exile the Jews relied only on God and expected from the world only Jewish survival; "and that persisting in the first and obtaining the second, culminated in the Yom Kippur experience." [49] The Yom Kippur experience could exist because Jews believed that their God had not abandoned them. Jews believed that the God who saved them at the Red Sea would return and save them again. When Jews in the past prayed for atonement from their sins on Yom Kippur, they relied on the God of Revelation to forgive them, and they trusted His Justice and Mercy.

Fackenheim says that post-Holocaust Jews cannot believe in a God who, by all indications, abandoned His people, and did not save six-million innocent Jews during the Holocaust. They can no longer trust God's Justice or Mercy and so they cannot speak to God on Yom Kippur to pray for atonement. Thus, Fackenheim says that contemporary Jewish thought and prayer is paralyzed by the Holocaust. Post-Holocaust Jews have lost all hope in the God of Revelation.

Fackenheim, however, recognizes that while the event of the Holocaust paralyzes contemporary Jewish thought, it did not paralyze the existence of some of the victims of the Holocaust. Fackenheim says that,

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[48] Ibid., p. 321
[49] Ibid., p. 323

> Authentic thought was actual during the Holocaust among resisting victims; and being possible, it is mandatory. Moreover, their resisting thought pointed to and helped make possible a resisting life; our post Holocaust thought...would still lapse into unauthenticity if it remained in an academically-self enclosed circle—if it failed to point to, and help make possible, a post-holocaust life. [50]

A *Tikkun*, here and now, is mandatory because a *Tikkun*, then and there, took place in the resistance of the victims.

From the journals and letters left by the victims we know that victims struggled to maintain their humanity towards one another and even the smallest measure of their own human dignity. Some wrote that they felt that they had been commanded to live and maintain the spark of God within themselves. Some observed Yom Kippur in any small way they could. While post-Holocaust Jews may find it impossible to turn to God on Yom Kippur, some Jews at Auschwitz and Buchenwald risked their lives to fast and pray on Yom Kippur. Hassidim in Buchenwald risked death and sold four days of bread rations back to their Ukrainian guard for a set of *tefillin.* Many other Jewish victims died with the Shema on their lips. Members of the Warsaw Ghetto fought against the Nazi army. They were well aware they could not overcome the Germans, yet, they felt commanded, none the less, to live. There are countless other acts of resistance of which we can never be aware. Fackenheim understands these as original acts of *Tikkun*; a mending of the rupture with God and a turning to God in the most unlikely of circumstances, at the worst of all possible times in Jewish history. Fackenheim says that the source of the victim's strength is a continuing source of astonishment. Their *Tikkun,* he maintains, is, and should be, the ultimate basis for our own.

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[50] Ibid., p. 249

According to Fackenheim, at this point in his thinking, the *Tikkun*, which for the post-Holocaust Jew is a necessity, is a possibility because during the Holocaust a Jewish *Tikkun* had already begun. Fackenheim says, "That this is true...is the rock on which rests any authentic future, and any authentic future Jewish identity..." [51] The fortitude and courage of these Jewish resisters, that surpassed all realistic possibilities of human tenacity, Fackenheim says, is an inexhaustible source of wonder, and "the sole basis, now and henceforth, of a Jewish existence, whether religious or secular..."[52] He adds that on this basis, the accidental and holy remnant of post-Holocaust Jews can find their own fortitude to endure the anguish of the recent past, and a new point of departure from which begin their own work of *Tikkun*.

But Fackenheim soon realized that those who resisted had been able to find the Commanding Voice of God because they had not lost hope in the Saving God of Revelation. They continued to be commanded by God, even in their anguish. But, post-Holocaust Jews have lost hope in Revelation altogether. They can no longer believe in the Saving Presence of God at the Red Sea or the Commanding Presence of God at Sinai. As Fackenheim has said before, Jews after the Holocaust must recover the Saving Presence of God in the world first in order to recover the Commanding Presence of God in the world once again.

However, Fackenheim soon points out that there is a problem inherent in a *Tikkun* that begins only with those Jews who in some way resisted their Nazi captors. Fackenheim explains that,

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[51] Ibid., p. 300
[52] Ibid., p. 302

> If (as we must) hold fast to...the whole murdered people and its innocence, then we must surely despair of any possible *Tikkun*: but then we neglect or ignore the few and select—those with...the will and strength to resist...—whose *Tikkun* (as we have seen) precedes and makes mandatory our own. And if (as we also must) we hold fast to just these select and their *Tikkun*, then our *Tikkun*, made possible by theirs, neglects and ignores all those who performed no heroic or saintly deeds such as to merit holiness and who yet, murdered as they were in utter innocence, must be considered holy. [53]

Fackenheim warns that a *Tikkun* that begins only with the victims who resisted poses another danger to Jewish thought today. He says that after being inspired by the martyrdom and the resistance, the inspiration soon disintegrates and everything religious and secular is restored as if nothing has happened. For Fackenheim, Jewish life after the Holocaust can never be as it was before the Holocaust and Jews cannot act as if nothing has happened.

We must find a Tikkun that honors all the victims of the Holocaust. Fackenheim adds that post-Holocaust generations of Jews are a remnant that is heir to all the Jews murdered in the Holocaust; those who found the strength to resist and those who could not. After the Holocaust, according to Fackenheim, Jews must seek a *Tikkun* that includes the inspiration of the Jewish resistance, but that goes beyond it to include all the Jewish victims of the Nazis and the Jewish future.

Fackenheim says that the modern State of Israel is a *Tikkun* of the rupture between God and the generations after the Holocaust that begins with all the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and addresses the future of Judaism. This *Tikkun*, Fackenheim says, is a collective and distinctive Jewish response to the Holocaust.

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[53] Ibid., p. 309

This *Tikkun* began when the first Jewish "Displaced Person," or "DP," responded in a radical way to what he had experienced in the concentration camp, and to what he was experiencing in the DP camp. Fackenheim explains that the non-Jewish DP was displaced, but had a home to which he could return. The Jewish DP did not have a home and was barred legally and militarily from Israel. Many of the Jewish DP's did not wait for a country to offer them refuge and would not return to the countries from which they had been taken. Jews were still considered, at best, second class citizens in these places, and the anger and stigma of having been in the camps would have been unbearable, had they returned. They took matters into their own hands and went to Israel, even before it was legal. Israel was the only place where, although there would be neither peace nor oblivion, they would find an indisputable home.

But, the *Tikkun* that is Israel also fragmentary. Fackenheim explains that Israel is limited in its power to rescue Jews, even though it can offer them a home, if and when they are released. There is strife and not always a strong Jewish identity for Israeli citizens. Fackenheim adds that "If the *Tikkun* is fragmentary, the whole enterprise is laden with risk."[54] There is always talk of peace, but there are also constant threats and intermittent wars. Enemies seek to destroy Israel altogether and either exile or murder its Jewish inhabitants.

In light this Fackenheim says one might ask, what then is the *Tikkun* that is Israel? In response Fackenheim says;

> It is Israel itself. It is a state founded, maintained, defended, by a people who—so it was once thought—had lost the art of statecraft and self-defense forever. It is the replanting and reforestation of a land that—so it once seemed—was unredeemable swamps and desert. It is a people gathered

[54] Ibid., p. 312

> from all corners of the earth on a territory with—so the experts once said—not enough room to swing a cat. It is a living language that—so even friends once feared--was dead beyond revival. It is a City rebuilt that—so once the consensus of mankind had it—was destined to remain holy ruins, and it is in and through all this, on behalf of the accidental remnant, after unprecedented death, a unique celebration of life. [55]

Fackenheim has said that a *Tikkun* after the Holocaust would require the participation of both Divine and human power. The *Tikkun* that is Israel could only have happened with God's help. According to Fackenheim, the Saving Presence of God has also returned to the ancient Land. Fackenheim recognizes the Presence of God in the miraculous return of so many Jews to Israel after an exile that had no end in sight, and in Israel's ability to survive and grow. "For Fackenheim, the State of Israel is living testimony to God's continued Saving Presence in history and through it the modern Jew witnesses a re-affirmation of the 'root experience' of salvation essential to the survival of Jewish faith." [56] Fackenheim further concludes that, because of Israel, post-Holocaust Jews are beginning to recover the Saving God of Revelation in their lives.

There is lasting astonishment in the fact that at this time, of all times, the Jewish people has returned to Jerusalem. Astonishment, Fackenheim says is the deepest source of religious faith. Day to day problems can cause a temporary loss of astonishment and joy. Jews outside of Israel hear about them and Jews in Israel endure them. Nevertheless, in great moments the astonishment and the joy come to life again and

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[55] Ibid., pp. 312-313

[56] Katz, Steven, "Jewish Faith after the Holocaust" *Encyclopedia Judaica CD-ROM Edition* (Israel: Judaica Multimedia, 1997) key word "Fackenheim"

again. "And with the help of the religious imagination this coming to life is an ever-present possibility." [57]

Fackenheim says that being in Jerusalem is a mystical experience. He explains that one need only go to the busy corner of Rehov Yaffo and Ben Yehudah and see the throngs of people bustling up against each other. "Then imagine the ancient lament of the darkest time in Biblical history; "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people?" This verse from, Lamentations 1:1 this is the lament on the 9th of Av. It represents the core of all Jewish sorrow. Yet, Fackenheim says, out of the greatest Jewish sorrow, the Holocaust, "A sublime joy and a unique astonishment comes over a Jew of today."[58]

Israel, Fackenheim says, has opened a new page in the history of Jews and Judaism. He adds that today Israel is an "orienting reality" for all Jewish and all post-Holocaust thought. For Jews after the Holocaust, the meaning of Torah and prayer has changed. Fackenheim explains that,

> After the Holocaust, Jews cannot read as once they did, of a God who sleeps not and slumbers not; and after the resurrection of the Jewish state that includes Jerusalem, they cannot pray for the city as though, if not there, they could not get there by an easy El Al flight. [59]

When hope was murdered in the Holocaust, Jews coming after might have discarded the Jewish Bible and not raised Jewish children any more. This would have been reasonable because without hope Jews cannot live. Fackenheim says that against all odds the Jewish people have persevered through the centuries. Today, the difficult task

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[57] Fackenheim, Emil l., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 39
[58] Ibid., p. 39
[59] Fackenheim, Emil L., *The Jewish Bible after the Holocaust: A Rereading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) vii

of *Tikkun* after the Holocaust might have been too much to for these people to bear. In that case, we might have been left with the prospect of a world without Jews. When instead Jews opened a new page in their history by restoring the Jewish state, there was "a unique intertwining of religious faith and secular courage... [that] resurrected the murdered hope." [60]

Fackenheim says that a resurrected hope is not like a hope that has never died, because once hope has been murdered once, it could be murdered again. A new page, that is Israel, is being written in the age-old history of Judaism. Those writing it, both religious and secular Jews, have been brought together by a hope resurrected, although this hope is shot through with doubt. Like previous times, salvation came to the Jewish people, this time monumentally with the restoration Israel. Nevertheless, the Holocaust penetrates both the religious and the secular consciousness. Neither can avoid the frightening thought that a salvation that came too late once could come too late again. Nevertheless, it is a new kind of hope now that keeps Jews in the Land today.

The opening of a new page in Jewish history was symbolically expressed on the first day of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Old men in Jerusalem ran out from their synagogues, interrupting their prayers, they rushed into the streets and tore out pages from their prayer books in order to give them to the departing soldiers. These pious men did not hesitate to mutilate their prayer books. Religious and secular soldiers alike did not hesitate to accept the gift.

Fackenheim observes that the whole Jewish people shared in *Teshuvah* on that Yom Kippur. Jews all over the world stood behind Israel and supported those soldiers in any way they could. Fackenheim goes on to ask how the whole Jewish people can share

[60] Ibid., p. 69

in *Teshuvah* on Yom Kippur today. The answer, Fackenheim explains, is that the religious Jew spends Yom Kippur, as he always has, in synagogue praying and reading Torah. The secular Jew, whether inside or outside of the synagogue, also reads Torah. The Torah is the Book of all the Jewish people, although the two ways of reading are not the same.

Religious Jews read the Torah as a system of religious certainties and secular Jews read it as a system of anti-religious certainties. If each group reads the Torah only within their own enclosed world, the result may be a conflict between religious certainties and anti-religious certainties. Secular Jews may reject a miracle at the Red Sea and Revelation at Sinai, but, if committed to a Jewish future, they cannot reject the experience of their people. Jews have endured "degradation and exile rather than abandon the Torah and the God who at Sinai had given it." [61]

Fackenheim says that for the Jew today, the Jewish Bible is a book of national a well as sacred history. This history affirms a deeper meaning and a Divine purpose together with the plain historical facts that claim to be only what they are and nothing more. For many Jews, especially in Israel, the Hebrew Bible contains their national history and nothing else. Since much of the history goes back to an ancient mythical past, the Jewish Bible also contains the national mythology of the Jewish people. According to Fackenheim, it is this book, its history or mythology or whatever else a Jew may find within it that has brought so many Jews back to Israel.

Fackenheim points out the astonishing fact that neither religious nor secular Jews would or could have made this return were it not for the Jewish Bible. Despite the

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[61] Fackenheim Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Present Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 57

Fackenheim points out the astonishing fact that neither religious nor secular Jews would or could have made this return were it not for the Jewish Bible. Despite the different ways these two groups read the same Bible, both are committed to a shared future. Fackenheim repeats the age old truth that just as Israel has kept the Torah so the Torah has kept Israel. This old truth has become manifest in our time in a new form: in the astonishing fact that after two millennia, a people were returned to its language, its state and its land. The Torah is the shared experience that makes possible a new bond between the State of Israel, God and the Jewish people, after the Holocaust. According to Fackenheim, "These are the gates of *Teshuvah* open to the whole Jewish people today."[64]

A generation ago an unprecedented attempt was made, by the Nazis to rid the world of Jews. Fackenheim continues; "However, whether the world today realizes it, it cannot do without Jews—the accidental remnant that, heir to the holy ones, is itself bidden to be holy. Neither, in our time, can God Himself." [65] Fackenheim explains that if Jews after the Holocaust question why they, the accidental remnant of their people, are left, the answer is that they are witness to the one true God of the world. This answer becomes a gift to God.

Fackenheim explains that for post-Holocaust Jews the nature and role of God in human affairs and Jewish history are not simply given to us. The Divine Presence as a reality depends on the witness of the Jewish people, the accidental remnant. Fackenheim says; "Today even God, the possibility of His presence and any remaining confidence in

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[64] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 328
[65] Ibid., p. 330

Him, depends upon Jewish fidelity. In a post-Holocaust world, the Jewish people are even God's last hope." [66]

For Fackenheim, Israel is central to all post-Holocaust Jewish authenticity. That authenticity, it turns out includes both secular and religious Jews, who remain realistic and independent on the one hand, and yet, are filled with a precarious awe and hopefulness on the other. Fackenheim adds that "not until religious and secular Jews chose a shared destiny in the modern Jewish State did the Jewish shibboleth of revelation assume a modern form that was both unambiguous and inescapable."[67]

Finally, Fackenheim tells us that he is struck by the song that Israeli children sing: *Am Yisrael Chai*. He says that this song speaks as a hymn. The words of the first two lines are; *Am Israel chai* (The Jewish people lives) *Od avinu chai* (Our Father still lives.) Fackenheim asks how it is possible to sing this song today with joy. In Israel the Holocaust has not been forgotten, and Israel's future is not yet secure, but the bond between the Jewish people and their God is mending. And, it is still true, that, as Fackenheim wrote almost thirty years ago, that "The world is somewhat less dark today because after the Holocaust there arose a state of Israel." [68]

Fackenheim has already said that it was God's Saving Presence at the Red Sea that made possible God's Commanding Presence at Sinai. Post-Holocaust Jews are recovering the God of Salvation in the modern State of Israel. Fackenheim now asks how

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[66] Morgan, Michael, ed., *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 210
[67] Fackenheim, Emil L., *To Mend the World* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982) 145
[68] Fackenheim, Emil L., *The Jewish Return into History* (New York: Schocken Books,1978) 198

Jews can recover the Commanding God of Sinai after the Holocaust. He asks "How can the modern Jew stake his blessedness on the past fact of revelation at Sinai?" [69]

First Fackenheim reiterates his earlier view that Torah is given "whenever a person receives it." [70] Fackenheim adds that a Jew receives Torah whenever he accepts his covenantal relation with the God of the fathers. He receives it whenever he studies the Torah, and whenever he walks in its ways. But, Fackenheim says that this answer does not completely work for our own time because of the epoch making events that have occurred, in the history of not only the Jews, but also of Judaism.

How, then, does the modern Jew receive Torah in light of the fact that after the Holocaust, past Revelation no longer comes to the present, through an authority that modern Jews can accept as reliable? According to Fackenheim, after the Holocaust a Jew must reach out for the past. Fackenheim explains that post-Holocaust Jews cannot begin with Torah and then build a life around it. Rather, post-Holocaust Jews begin with life, which is sacred above all else after the Holocaust, and bring Torah into that life. Thus, Fackenheim says if Jews continue to study and read Torah, they will find a place for Torah in their lives.

Fackenheim has discovered a Tikkun that can begin to overcome the rupture between God and Jews after the Holocaust. This *Tikkun* is the modern State of Israel, and because of it post-Holocaust Jews are beginning to believe once again that the God who saved the Israelites at the Red Sea can save them still. Thus, the future of Judaism is no longer seems as precarious to Fackenheim. He believes that the future of Judaism will

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[69] Fackenheim, Emil L., *What is Judaism? An Interpretation for the Modern Age* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999) 99
[70] Ibid., p. 98

include, as it should, the Jewish God of Revelation. But, Fackenheim insists that after the Holocaust, nothing, including Judaism, can be exactly as it was before.

Conclusion

Throughout all of Fackenheim's writing he clearly maintains a consistent definition of revelation. For Fackenheim, simply put, revelation is the event of Divine Presence in the world. Fackenheim believed that the Infinite God reveals Himself in the finite world, to individuals or to a group of individuals. This is possible because in His Infinity, God makes it possible.

Early in his writings on revelation Fackenheim concludes that revelation in all religions have several common characteristics. Fackenheim explains that revelation is accessible to all men and is central to all religious life and beliefs. What distinguishes forms of religious life are the ways in which the experience is interpreted. What is common to all religions is that revelation is the human encounter with God in the world and in history. The prerequisite for revelation, according to Fackenheim, is the belief that divine revelation, as Fackenheim has described it, is possible.

This is the core belief of Fackenheim's Jewish faith. As Fackenheim understands it, Jewish religious thinking begins with the belief that Divine Revelation is possible. Judaism is a religion of Revelation that affirms a God, who's Presence can be experienced in this world, and within historical time. According to Fackenheim, a believing Jew, who has not experienced God's Presence himself, fully accepts that God's Presence was experienced by his Jewish ancestors, and that such an experience is still possible. Revelation cannot be empirically proven, and must be accepted through faith. Faith according to Fackenheim is a committed openness to the possibility of Revelation.

According to Fackenheim, God descends into time and rather than destroying time, time becomes meaningful. Revelation is the sudden spontaneous entrance of Eternity into time, of God into history. The event of revelation is spontaneous, but the interpretation of what the event means to the person or people who have experienced it takes place after the event. For Fackenheim, revelation affects history in that it is interpreted in time and fulfilled in history. The future of the individual, his community, and the world are affected by the interpretative response of man to God in his own life. This is what gives revelation its historical dimension. These experiences, then, are interpreted and documented in the sacred books of that faith. Revelation, then, becomes a religious truth and religious truths are accepted on faith.

In this early period of his writing, Fackenheim, influenced by Rosenzweig's view, maintained that there is no content or message communicated by God in revelation. Revelation is only the awareness of God's Presence. Revelation is unintelligible and beyond comprehension because God, who is wholly Other, is also necessarily beyond human comprehension. Reflecting Buber's view, Fackenheim believes that if revelation were comprehensible, it would not be true revelation, but something human that comes from inside of oneself. Ideas arising in what one may think is the course of the encounter, are actually by-products of revelation after it is over. Although revelation delivers no content while the encounter is taking place, man subsequently interprets what he understands the content to be and is transformed by it.

Later Fackenheim reconsidered part of this view that there is no content or message communicated by God in revelation. According to Fackenheim this created a dichotomy between the experience of revelation and its human interpretation that was

excessively large. Fackenheim then came to the conclusion that Revelation in Judaism has a built in content because God is not an ineffable Presence into which man dissolves.

Instead, Fackenheim says that in Revelation man is confirmed in his humanity because God allows him complete human freedom to respond to Revelation. Further, the Jewish God of Revelation commands man with commandments that he can fulfill in his finite humanity. God is a Presence speaking to man which singles him out for response. In Fackenheim's new understanding, the content of revelation begins with "He spoke." Thus, Fackenheim concluded that all believing openness to the future is a structured openness and not an empty one. It is an openness which listens and responds; remaining open to the possibility of Divine Revelation.

Fackenheim maintains that the Jewish faith began with the two events of Divine Revelation recorded in the Torah; God's Saving Presence at the Red Sea and God's Commanding Presence at Sinai. These, according to Fackenheim are the formative experiences of Judaism. At the Red Sea the Israelites were immediately aware of the Saving Presence of God. At Sinai all the Israelites heard the Commanding Voice of God and, by agreeing to live by God's commandments, they entered into a covenantal relationship with God. The Israelites became the Jewish people. For thousands of years Judaism was sustained by re-reading, reenacting and re-experiencing these two moments of God's Presence. Through Jewish ritual and liturgy, over the centuries Jews have continued to believe that God, who saved them at the Red Sea, still had the power to save them. By obeying God's Commandments Jews believed that God was still present in the commandments, and in His covenant with Israel, just as God had been present at Sinai.

Fackenheim believes that revelation, in light of its nature, is a gift to man from a God, who is wholly other than man. Thus, the concept of revelation for Fackenheim is miraculous by definition. According to Fackenheim, Revelation in Judaism is possible because in His Infinity, God makes it possible. Revelation is Judaism's religious truth. Fackenheim says that while we cannot prove the existence of God, neither can it be disproved. The essence of Jewish faith is the certainty that one stands in relation to a God that is neither provable nor refutable.

Fackenheim explains that it has always been the case, that the God of Judaism not only reveals Himself to mankind; he also conceals Himself at other times. There are numerous examples of this in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Midrash. While, in our humanity, we do not know why this is the case, Jews have always believed that God, as it were, always turns back to face his Jewish people. Yet, when Jews needed their God the most, during the Holocaust, this did not happen.

Fackenheim is well aware that Jewish faith in the God of the Red Sea and of Sinai was a very difficult challenge for Jews after the Holocaust. Many post-Holocaust Jews wonder whether a God who could save, and did not save His people at Auschwitz, really exists at all. Personally, Fackenheim did not question the existence of God. Nevertheless, the Holocaust raised questions about God and Revelation for Fackenheim. In his writings Fackenheim sought to answer those questions without diminishing his own faith in the God of Revelation, and in an effort to help Jews after the Holocaust find faith in the God of Revelation.

Along with the rest of the world in the late 1960's Fackenheim began to fully confront the dark realities of the Holocaust. Fackenheim realized that there is not, and

can never be, a theological explanation for the Holocaust. Nevertheless, he posits that God's Commanding Voice is still being heard by Jews throughout the world. The Jewish God of Revelation, Fackenheim said, was still present in the world. After Auschwitz, God was commanding Jews to survive so that Judaism would not perish after the Holocaust. Fackenheim further explained that Jews are "hearing" what is being "commanded," because they are obeying this commandment. Jews, after the Holocaust were continuing to live Jewish lives and raise Jewish children. This for Fackenheim was a remarkable act of faith. Thus, the Commanding Voice of Sinai was once again present to the Jewish people in the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz. Fackenheim explains that, unlike Sinai, God's Commanding Voice this time was addressing Jews individually, but they were responding as a people. What was being commanded was the 614th Commandment; the imperative that Jews not give Hitler a posthumous victory.

Twenty years after Fackenheim first spoke about the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz, he came to the conclusion that he had not taken into consideration many of the theological issues that post Holocaust Jews were facing. Fackenheim was acutely aware that if post-Holocaust Judaism was to be a lasting Judaism, it must include the Jewish God of Revelation. The Holocaust must not be allowed to reformulate Judaism beyond recognition, and undermine the very basis of Jewish belief. If the God of Revelation is in question, then the future of Judaism, in any recognizable form, is also at risk.

Fackenheim believes that the Holocaust has created a rupture between post-Holocaust Jews and God, making it very difficult, if not impossible, for modern Jews to accept the traditional God of Revelation. Nevertheless, Fackenheim insists that belief in

the Divine Presence is possible after the Holocaust, and that it is essential to the future of Jewish faith after the Holocaust.

Fackenheim's initial response, as Jews began to face the events of the Holocaust was the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz. Fackenheim now says that when he formulated the 614th Commandment in 1967, he had not yet considered all of the issues facing post-Holocaust Jews. Fackenheim then realized that the Saving Presence of God must be recovered because the Commanding Voice of God in the 614th Commandment did not go far in addressing the problems of post-Holocaust Judaism.

In Fackenheim's opinion, post-Holocaust Jews have lost hope in the God of Revelation altogether. They can no longer believe in the Saving Presence of God at the Red Sea or the Commanding Presence of God at Sinai. As Fackenheim has said before, Jews after the Holocaust must recover the Saving Presence of God in the world first, in order to recover the Commanding Presence of God in the world once again.

Fackenheim believes that for Revelation in Judaism to be meaningful to post-Holocaust Jews it must be must be a present experience. Post-Holocaust Jews can no longer accept the authority of the ancient record of Revelation in the Torah. Fackenheim adds that for Jews after the Holocaust, any commitment to the God of Revelation must be a personal commitment out of personal experience.

Fackenheim finally concludes that such a commitment can only take place in the modern State of Israel, and, if fact, that it has already begun to happen. In Israel post-Holocaust Jews are recovering the God of Salvation as a present experience. According to Fackenheim, the Saving Presence of God has returned to the ancient Land with His Jewish people after the Holocaust. Fackenheim recognizes the Presence of God in the

miraculous return of so many Jews to Israel, from the four corners of the earth, after an exile that had no end in sight. For Fackenheim God's Saving Presence can also found and in Israel's recent and sustained ability to survive and grow. "For Fackenheim, the State of Israel is living testimony to God's continued Saving Presence in history and through it the modern Jew witnesses a re-affirmation of the 'root experience' of salvation essential to the survival of Jewish faith." [1] Fackenheim further concludes that, because of Israel, post-Holocaust Jews are beginning to recover the Saving God of Revelation in their lives.

Because Israel exists, all Jews can say "never again." Hope for the future has returned to the Jewish people, after the darkest period in Jewish history. The bustling streets of Jerusalem, once so deserted, and the desert that has been made to bloom, are nothing short of miraculous to Fackenheim. And, in the astonishment and in the miracle of the Jewish State, Fackenheim sees the Presence of the Divine; the Jewish God of Revelation.

Finally, throughout the life of his writing, Fackenheim's understanding of the essential nature of Revelation in Judaism did not change. It is the details, not the essence of Revelation that is different at the end of Fackenheim's theological journey than they were at the beginning of the journey. Fackenheim, like Judaism itself, was affected by the historical reality of the Holocaust and the State of Israel. As he considered each of these separately and together, Fackenheim attempted to come to terms with them. As a result of that process, Fackenheim's view of Revelation in Judaism continued to evolve,

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[1] Katz, Steven, "Jewish Faith after the Holocaust" *Encyclopedia Judaica CD-ROM Edition* (Israel: Judaica Multimedia, 1997) key word "Fackenheim"

and broaden through each stage of his life. Fackenheim sought to clarify those views for himself and for his readers, throughout the duration of his writings and his life.

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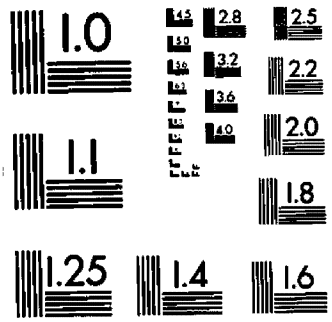
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