

»GOD WHO RUNS A RISK«

Systematic-theological Reflections on the Idea of a Free History - The Challenge of Doing Theology after Auschwitz

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Walter Benjamin's reaction to the »Novus Angelus« by the painter Paul Klee is remarkable for its prescience. Written in 1925, he comments that the painting

»shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.«¹

When considered from the Abrahamic perspective, theology after Auschwitz can be described as the squaring of the circle; there are and must be at least four different theological perspectives corresponding to Catholic and Protestant Christian, Jewish and Islamic standpoints. None of these can ignore the meaning of Auschwitz, each will see it differently and in doing so it would seem that none of them can avoid falling back on the father of their faiths: Abraham. Johann-Baptiste Metz tellingly argues, »We Christians can never again go back behind Auschwitz: to go beyond Auschwitz, if we see clearly, is impossible for us of ourselves.«² As a matter of fact, Auschwitz is the break for the »cultural self-understanding of

¹ Walter Benjamin, »Theses on the Philosophy of History,« in *Illuminations* (ed. W. Benjamin; New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 253-64, 257.

² Johann Baptist Metz, »Christians and Jews after Auschwitz. Being a Meditation Also on the End of Bourgeois Religion,« in *A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (ed. M. M. Morgan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 238-50, 239.

people.«³ What he says about Christianity is certainly true of these other Abrahamic faiths.

The purpose of this article is to show that there is no serious way in which theology can talk about God without talking about Auschwitz, and this talk cannot avoid confronting the philosophical and theological problem of theodicy. There have been many theological reflections on God and evil; God and the suffering of the innocent is best approached as a theodicy-analogue.⁴ Theodicy as a modern philosophical question is connected with the essay Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz wrote in 1710: »Essai de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal«⁵ (The Essay on the Goodness of God, the freedom of man and the origin of Evil). Leibniz's intention – arguing against the Protestant theologian Pierre Bayle – was to prove that the world as created by God is the best of all possible worlds. In order for God to have selected and created the best world – that is, the one that exists – he must be understood as the being who is omnibenevolent, omnipotent and omniscient. But if this is not the best world he could have created, then he is less than fully benevolent, less able to create the best, or less knowing about what is the best world to have been created. Confronted by the suffering and evil events of human history, which suggest that this world cannot have been the best world possibly creatable by God, God is then readily indictable by human reason as the author of this suffering and evil. If God is the creator of this world, then reason readily concludes that he at least tolerates this intolerable suffering, even if he is not its deliberate author. But for believers in the Abrahamic faith, creation and covenant narratives, God must also be discharged from this accusation since creation would not be reasonable.

Nevertheless, God is the creator of this best thinkable world for Leibniz. His optimism about God's creation was shaken to its very foundations after the earthquake in Lisbon in 1755. Both Voltaire and Kant argued against Leibniz. Voltaire was sure that the earthquake that killed so many innocent people was the best proof that God indeed did not create the best possible world, or if he did, he lost his omnipotence. In reflecting on Leibniz, Kant attempted to bring to an end the philosophical effort to make sense of theodicean questions when in 1781 he argued that »our reason is absolutely incapable of insight into the relationship in

³ Magnus Striet, »Christologie nach der Shoah? Horizontverschiebungen,« in *Streitfall Christologie: Vergewisserungen nach der Shoa* (ed. H. Hopping and J. H. Tück, Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2005), 182–215, 183. All quotes are translated by myself.

⁴ Anja Middelbeck-Varwick, *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch: Erkundungen zur Theodizee in Islam und Christentum* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2009); Thomas Pröpper, Magnus Striet, »Theodizee,« *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 9: 1396–98.

⁵ Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Die Theodizee* (trans. A. Buchenau; 2nd ed.; Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1968).

which any world as we may ever become acquainted with through experience stands with respect to the highest wisdom«⁶

For Kant human reason is not able to conclude from the phenomena of things towards a divine plan behind this experience. If human reason wants to postulate knowledge of a divine plan, it can only do so from a critical perspective, which is to say that it will be unmasked for pursuing overgrown, excessive and exaggerated rational systems and conclusions. This philosophical pursuit of the question of suffering humankind does more harm than good when it tries to transfer suffering into something intelligible, into a rationality.⁷ What is left? Modern times are left with the anthropodicy in which »the best excuse for God is not to exist« (Stendhal), a sentence of which Nietzsche was jealous.⁸ With the dismissal of theodicy God was also subject to dismissal; if he cannot be used to make rational sense of suffering, then he is of no value from a human point of view. Without God's rational will to make sense of suffering, human beings no longer had an authority to appeal to (or to accuse). For some, this relieved human beings of their responsibility to God, but in the minds of others, it provided hope for better times: hence, the age of secularity and atheism.

»The absurdity of historical suffering was definite.«⁹ But what are we to do? If we accept that philosophically, theodicy »is [also] at the end«¹⁰, we have to look at the question theologically by differentiating the philosophical and theological tasks. As a theodicean matter, the question of God is a question of faith. If »theodicy is really a question of God, which expects a real counterpart, [then] it is only asked in the perspective of faith.«¹¹ *First*, Theodicy as *Theo-dicy* is a question of faith in God; in the secular context it becomes an *anthropo-dicy*. The question is where does the ultimate responsibility lay; with God or man? *Second*, one cannot

⁶ Immanuel Kant, »On the miscarriage of all philosophical trials,« in *Religion and Rational Theology* (ed. A. Wood and G. Di Giovanni; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20–37, 30. Original quote: »daß unsere Vernunft zur Einsicht des Verhältnisses, in welchem eine Welt, so wie wir sie durch Erfahrung immer kennen mögen, zu der höchsten Weisheit stehe, [ist] schlechterdings unvermögend.« Immanuel Kant, *Schriften zur Anthropologie, Geschichtsphilosophie, Politik und Pädagogik, 1. Teil* (vol. 9 of *Werke in zehn Bänden*; ed. W. Weischedel; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), 114.

⁷ Thomas Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich: Notizen zur Theodizee,« in *Evangelium und freie Vernunft: Konturen einer theologischen Hermeneutik* (ed. T. Pröpper; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2001), 266–75, 267.

⁸ Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich. Notizen zur Theodizee,« 268.

⁹ Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich. Notizen zur Theodizee,« 268.

¹⁰ Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich. Notizen zur Theodizee,« 267.

¹¹ Magnus Striet, »Versuch über die Auflehnung: Philosophisch-theologische Überlegungen zur Theodizeefrage,« in *Mit Gott streiten. Neue Zugänge zum Theodizee-Problem* (ed. H. Wagner; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 1998), 48–89, 55.

talk about God in an abstract way. God is historically known. Christians believe God to be the Self-Revelation in the historical reality of Jesus Christ.

Still, philosophy cannot be so easily dismissed from the responsibility of reflecting on theodicy, and theology cannot talk about theodicy without reflecting in a philosophical way. But this philosophical reflection will have to recognize that no reflection is possible in a neutral manner; that is, without *dignifying* the suffering victim and without therefore understanding every such reflection as a *moral* act. Theology, however, will also have to change; it has to be a »theodicy-sensible« theology or it has to stop existing. Thus Johann-Baptiste Metz understands theology as the locus of theodicy since theology is talk about God in history and society where evil and suffering take place.

1. THEOLOGY AFTER AUSCHWITZ IS A THEOLOGY OF EMPTY SPACES

Why do we do Theology? Theology as the science of the existential question of God is a changing, always developing science. It constantly changes because it must dialogue with the other human and natural sciences which themselves are constantly changing. It changes especially when it engages contemporary issues, such as theodicy in the light of Auschwitz.¹² In this dialogue with the sciences theology contributes its insights and draws on those of its dialogue partners. To talk about God means to talk in a specific time period, which today means that God talk can neither ignore the impact of the sciences nor the overhang of singular historical events. Contemporary theology must reach back to the beginning of the post-second World War period for its boundaries, content and inspiration.

This era of Catholic theology must, of course, begin with the insights of Holy Scripture, the entire theological tradition, and the philosophical traditions that have been used by theologians at various times and places. The result is a hermeneutical circle that engages in God-talk from the various perspectives of the classical Tradition of faith and reason and which also draws into its purview contemporary scientific debates coupled with an interpretation of the meaning of the most historically important events. The impact if this new hermeneutic can be found in the Second Vatican Council in numerous documents: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*; *Lumen Gentium*; *Ad Gentes, Nostre Aetate*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Post conciliar Roman Catholic theologians have not failed to adopt

¹² See Gunda Werner; »Binnencharismatisierung der römisch-katholischen Kirche als Ausdruck der ecclesia semper reformanda? Anmerkungen zur internen Verarbeitung von Herausforderungen der Moderne«, in *Gerettet durch Begeisterung? Reform der katholischen Kirche durch christlich-charismatische Religiosität?* (ed. G. Werner; Freiburg et al.: Herder, 2018), 116–44, 136–140.

this hermeneutic. In considering the question of God's putative responsibility for the terrible events of the past century and related questions about the alleged impact of the Enlightenment on 20th century thought and events, they have argued that God's action in time is tremendous.¹³ In their hands history emerges as the history of salvation in which God's free will is decisive for an understanding of events. God is no longer just the source of truth but the decisive actor in history. The viewpoint that Jesus Christ is the Center and Lord of history is an implication of this hermeneutic. In consequence, theology is no longer only »*intellectus fidei*«, it is also and always »*interpretatio temporis*«¹⁴.

Faith is an interpretation of history as God's action in it. But this believed-in God of the covenant is free in his historical presence and action. Theology must reflect on this relationship between God and history and recognize that it is not an abstract relationship but an historical one. By the same token, the only way to do this theology is to understand history, not as a mere sequence of temporally delimited events, but in a transcendental way which includes the insight of God's freedom towards man. The relationship of God and humanity has to be thought in the categories of divine and human freedom which then allows for a rethinking of theodicy as a theological problem. Theology cannot exist without referring to history concretely and transcendently and for this to happen, Auschwitz itself (and all it stands for) emerges as the historical facet governing and referring to every reflection. Theology is different now.

Still, theology everywhere has for a long time failed to take Auschwitz seriously. This is especially surprising in regard to Roman Catholic theology in Germany where one would have thought a serious theological reflection would take place. As a matter of fact, it took over 30 years after the events themselves for Johann-Baptiste Metz, one of the key initiators of this new hermeneutic to begin to develop a self-consciously post-Auschwitz theology. This empty space was a space full of shameful memories of the Holocaust and of not dealing with Auschwitz. The years between 1945 and 1975, was a time in Germany when the country had yet to begin its broad reconciliation with the past, and it did this by underlining the idea that except for rabid Nazi's the country as a whole was »innocent« of complicity. Thus there was no pressure in those years for a specifically Catholic theological reconciliation with the past.

In contrast, to preserve any degree of post-war credibility Lutheran and Reformed Protestants quickly recognized that they had to confront the complicity of their churches for having nearly universally joined the official German National Church and its support for Hitler and the Nazi ideology. As a result, they produced

¹³ Peter Hünemann, »Gottes Handeln in der Geschichte: Theologie als Interpretatio temporis,« in *Freiheit Gottes und der Menschen* (ed. M. Böhnke et al.; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2006), 109–35, 110.

¹⁴ Hünemann, »Gottes Handeln in der Geschichte. Theologie als Interpretatio temporis,« 133.

important theological reflections and have been earnest dialogue partners with Jewish philosophers and theologians ever since. As a result, the abandoned »empty space« has been partially filled with recalled memories and confessed shame. A certain pride can be taken by those who have helped fill this empty space, since they at least have been among the »righteous« for having raised the larger theological questions imposed by Auschwitz.

Theology in this worldly hermeneutical perspective can become dominated by Christian discourse because of its numerical and cultural power. However, Jewish theology must be given its rightful primacy of place in order to properly honor the voices of those who were silenced, and to prevent theological power from remaining exclusively in the hands of Christian theology. Jewish theology evolved after the war in its own willingness to confront the issues raised by the Holocaust. It was nearly twenty-five years before a dialogue began that directly confronted the theodicy of Auschwitz. In the mid 1970's it too started a wide conversation about traditional Jewish belief in God from the perspective of the suffering of his elect, their grief, and about the history of God's tolerance for the apparent crime of the Holocaust.

Yet, of all the Abrahamic perspectives, the Muslim view is the most complicated. One has to separate very clearly from the theological issues an analysis of the political situation of Arabic Islam vis-à-vis Israel, which if indulged would lead us to a different topic. There are few Islamic voices anywhere that have directly confronted Auschwitz. I will discuss briefly those that have emerged very recently, the paucity of which suggests that Islam, though classified by scholars as an Abrahamic faith, has yet to focus on the theodicean implications of Auschwitz.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the empty space of Auschwitz is filled with grief for millions being murdered because »to be indifferent to human catastrophes [...] is greatly condemned.«¹⁶

2. ABRAHAMIC PERSPECTIVES – A THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

Abraham seems to be the unifying figure of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. »Abraham is for the three monotheistic religions the »father of faith«, the paradigm of trusting God. Abraham makes it possible to tell stories being part of a great

¹⁵ I had the chance to ask many German Moslem Scholars in Theology on a conference in March 2013. No one could tell me a concept about a Moslem Theology after Auschwitz, they are just starting to reframe Theology in modern times and secular society and dealing with questions of religious education etc. They all agreed the importance of this theological topic.

¹⁶ Mohammad A. Shomali, *Shi'i Islam: Origins, Faith and Practice* (London, Quom: 2003), 118.

narrative of a big family.«¹⁷ To understand Abraham only as the unifying figure of the three monotheistic religions is something of a theological consensus, but it does not take into account at least three counter-considerations: *first*, relying on one albeit central figure of the holy scriptures undermines the complicated and painful history of the often-conflicted relationship between these three religions. Although one of the leading thinkers of the Arab world emphasizes that Anti-Judaism was not an element of the emerging Islam¹⁸, the history of both Christian and Muslim religions exhibits a chain reaction of hostility towards Judaism, admittedly interrupted by intermittent periods of co-existence, which often went beyond mere separatism and resulted in persecution and murder. This is so even though Abraham as a unifying figure was often a hermeneutical focus for the faithful to live in peace with each other; the examples of peaceful coexistence can be seen in the Middle East, early medieval Spain, and at isolated times in other parts of Europe.

Since the focus of this paper is theological and not historical, I will not consider the oft-painful details of these relationships, however important it is to remember that they were mostly but not exclusively troubled. My *second* preliminary remark returns us to the theo-ethical dimension of the interreligious dialogue – which is still not a very common theological topic, at least not in Germany.¹⁹ This remark is that every interreligious encounter, including that between the Abrahamic faiths, understands its various viewpoints as a hermeneutic construction; it talks with a »reflected positioning« which understands its own truth as temporary.²⁰ In this approach, *common* criteria for the truth of the Abrahamic connection are hard to come by. It is as if in the urge to recognize that all points of view have a singular and unimpeachable truth in themselves, none have a truth value for all sides.

The *third* preliminary remark is that in order to develop the basis for a theology after Auschwitz in Abrahamic perspectives, it is necessary to identify these criteria and develop a trans-confessional understanding of the Abrahamic paradigm. These criteria will then help to form a paradigm according to which deci-

¹⁷ Christfried Böttrich, Beate Ego and Friedmann Eißler, *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 179.

¹⁸ Gilbert Achcar, *Die Araber und der Holocaust: Der arabisch-israelische Krieg in den Geschichtsschreibungen* (trans. B. Althaler and S. Deeg; Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 2012), 108.

¹⁹ There is a new publication from the Stephen S. Weinstein Series in Post-Holocaust Studies, which makes the results of a dialogue public: Leonard Grob and John K. Roth, *Encountering the Stranger: A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

²⁰ Bernd Schröder, »Abrahamitische Ökumene? Modelle der theologischen Zuordnung von christlich-jüdischem und christlich-islamischem Dialog,« *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 105 (2008): 456–87, 459.

sions can be made about the value of subsequent theological reflections. The case is as follows: by means of two approaches towards the Abrahamic paradigm I will develop criteria for a renewed, post-Auschwitz theological discourse.

The *first* approach – outlined by the German Catholic Theologian Karl Josef Kuschel – continues earlier research on the meaning of Abraham for the three religions with an emphasis on »Abrahamic ecumenism«. Referring back to the start of this research in the early 20th century²¹, Abraham returned into the focus of interreligious dialogue from the 70's on.²² This older Abrahamic paradigm was seen as a chance to restart theological reflection instead of limiting the Christian-Jewish dialogue (Islamic theology had little interest at the time in a dialogue) to pragmatic or social considerations. Theologians stressed the necessity that their discourse had to the foundation of the pressing ethical questions because the two (three) partners were first religious and second ethical people. Kuschel tried to affirm Abraham as the scriptural figure who alone *joins* these religions as each self-understood the classic, holy texts (Old Testament, New Testament, Koran) that they honor separately and share, and as they tried to come to grips with the history of their reception.²³ On the one hand, Abraham is not understood as Jew, Muslim or Christian, but on the other hand all three traditions are eager to underline Abraham as the role model for their own religious tradition.²⁴ Through an interfaith figure, as Kuschel reconstructed the history of his reception, Abraham emerged increasingly as someone whom each faith took possession of and believed was (one of) its foundational figures, and indeed, was identical with it. Thus at the same time, Abraham appears to be a stumbling block for the basis of interfaith understanding.²⁵

If Kuschel talks about »Abrahamic ecumenism,« he does not intend a »shared avowal, praxis and community structure«²⁶, but strives to allow the three religions to learn to accept that it is God who allocates the very specific ways in which each follows him. Abraham is the »self-critical corrective« in questioning one's

²¹ Abrahamic ecumenism was first developed by French orientalist and mystic Louis Massignon (1883–1962). He is the author of a famous book on muslim mysticism and was a good friend of Giovanni Battist Montini, later Pope Paul VI who can be seen to be highly influential for »Lumen Gentium« and »Nostra Aetate« (Böttrich, *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, 180f.).

²² Böttrich, *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, 467.

²³ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Streit um Abraham: Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt – und was sie eint* (2nd ed.; Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2003); Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Juden. Christen. Muslime. Herkunft und Zukunft* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2007).

²⁴ Böttrich, *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, 180.

²⁵ Schröder, »Abrahamitische Ökumene?,« 468.

²⁶ Kuschel, *Streit um Abraham*, 240.

own tradition and truth claims.²⁷ The *Second* approach stems from the Protestant theologian Bertold Klappert who accentuates Abraham in a different way. According to Klappert, Abraham is the figure of God's promise and blessing.²⁸ This is God's blessing towards Isaac, the first chosen, towards Ismail, the first circumcised and blessed in the covenant, third, towards those who are in Christ understood as blessed with Abraham, and fourth the entire World as the family of humankind to whom Abraham's blessing was promised. Consequently, Abraham is understood as the key figure and the origin of a multi-dimensional blessed and ethical community.²⁹ Within this conception two things can be pointed out: *first*, Klappert presupposes the idea of the one God of Abraham to be found articulated in Judaism, Islam and Christianity, and *second*, none of the three receivers of God's promise will obtain God's blessing without the others. »The promise of blessing to Abraham can only be recognized in its threefold (or fourfold) dimensionality or it will not be recognized at all. The exclusive delimitation [...] mutilates us religiously and in the end it will exclude us from the Abrahamic promise.«³⁰

Klappert's approach is to be valued highly. Regarding his view epistemologically, Abraham is still viewed through the perspective of the religious knowledge of each of the faiths and therefore does not represent the theo-ontic foundation for a trialogue. He is indeed the mutual foundation, since he is the objective basis of the three epistemologies, but he is also a figure of differentiation. Retrospectively, one can say on Klappert's behalf that the trialogue is challenged by Abraham to define the shared belief in the building of a just world, one in which inter-religious ethical action prevails and responsibility towards history and the future is taken seriously. This is a theological-hermeneutical approach and does not claim to frame an historical understanding of Abraham by which one can generate a paradigm for a post-Auschwitz theology. Nonetheless, his approach merits inclusion in any paradigm of how to conduct a trialogical conversation about theology after Auschwitz.

Unfortunately, in Klappert's account, Abraham is also reduced to a *symbolic* figure of harmony in an existential-European-centered perspective. This implies a division of form and content that reduces God-talk to abstractions, which is far afield from an historical approach to theology; far away from the fact that for these religions, history is the domain in which God's actions for mankind occur. Still, a

²⁷ Schröder, »Abrahamitische Ökumene?«, 469.

²⁸ Berthold Klappert, »Abraham eint und unterscheidet. Begründungen und Perspektiven eines nötigen ›Trialogs‹ zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen,« in *Bekenntnis zu dem einen Gott? Christen und Muslime zwischen Mission und Dialog* (ed. R. Werth; Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008), 98-122, 106.

²⁹ Klappert, »Abraham eint und unterscheidet,« 106.

³⁰ Klappert, »Abraham eint und unterscheidet,« 109.

trialogue of practical encounter and theological reflection is possible with a focus on the figure of Abraham. This triologue has to accept the differences in the foundations of every religion but can learn from the scriptural account of Abraham the *dramatis-personae* and from Abraham the prophet to practice *hospitality* in a spiritual, practical and theological meaning.³¹ The ancient Middle Eastern idea of (divine and human) hospitality is a theological category that has some promise of contributing to a meaningful post-Auschwitz theology sensitized to historically grounded categories and events, and it is closely related the combining Abraham-ic idea of a multi-dimensional, blessed ethical community.

Klappert's aspirations are much less than some theologians want to achieve, but it recognizes that there are real boundaries in the epistemologies of these faiths about the theo-ontic reality of Abraham that cannot be overcome; it sees the religious differences as a reality while at the same time locating points of commonality. This historical-theological approach is philosophically candid. *First*, it underlines the condition of every revealed religion: that form and content of a revelation cannot be distinguished. *Second*, it accepts what Lyotard postulates: that is, the end of trans-traditional master narratives. With more modest goals, an historical-theological methodology can lead the Abrahamic religions toward a more respectful and listening approach as each looks at his own religion in remembering a figure they all revere, and at a faith in a revealing God without denying the differences and the conflicted history they also share.

3. EDUCATION AFTER AUSCHWITZ

Theodor Adorno marked the challenge for education after Auschwitz in 1966: »Auschwitz should never be again« and this has to be the »first claim of every education.«³² Education is widely understood as the foundation of democratic thinking and historical responsibility, and in Germany it is a way to transmit the reality of guilt in the country of Auschwitz perpetrators – not to perpetuate an overbearing guilt, but to stand up for a just world; in this sense, »not to respond is to collaborate in its repetition.«³³

But it is difficult to maintain the key argument – that the following generations are responsible for what was done by earlier ones – in a society where succeeding generations are more and more removed from the holocaust events, where family is decreasingly responsible for teaching ethical matters, where

³¹ Böttrich, *Abraham in Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, 185.

³² Theodor W. Adorno, *Erziehung nach Auschwitz und Erziehung zur Mündigkeit heute* (Kritische Beiträge zur Bildungswissenschaft 3; Hannover: Offizin, 2010), 674.

³³ Irving Greenberg, »Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,« in *A Holocaust Reader. Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (ed. M. M. Morgan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 102–115, 106.

high-school students can no longer learn from a family that was not implicated and where even grandparents were themselves personally innocent. The further removed from the events, the harder it is to keep alive the ethical significance of what long-since deceased generations did. How do you transfer an argument which was built upon the concrete guilt and sin of parents and grandparents into the concept of an ongoing diachronic guilt-connection over the long haul? When the events and the parsing of corresponding responsibility are so enormous that they dare not be forgotten, what is to be done?

The Holocaust for Germany stands out unmatched, even though other societies have their own theodicean catastrophes to address. The problem of maintaining a continuity of awareness in Germany is heightened by the fact that in the most populated areas 40–80% of high school students have a very recent migration background, and where in coming years nearly 40% of all students will have migrant backgrounds.³⁴ Many of these students might even have immigrated to Germany because their grandparents had been victims of the National Socialists and are reclaiming their German heritage, while others are not related to this history at all. In neither case does it seem appropriate to stress this continuity of responsibility.

Educationists and sociologists are asking how to construct an education after Auschwitz that forms citizens sensitized to the social, political and personal factors conducive to the dangers of its repetition. Theodor Adorno, for one, thought that it was not enough to emphasize the theme of »never again« but also to consider this pedagogy in larger, post-1930's contexts, which must have seemed a cynical strategy for his generation.³⁵ It appears to be difficult to honor the singularity of what happened in Auschwitz and also talk about other circumstances where similar, though not identical evils, occurred or might occur. However, there is no other way to protect the future without considering other present and future sociological situations. On this view, an education that honored the past by dignifying the victims would actually be complemented by identifying past (and future possible) causes. It would be a curriculum that talks about preventing them from ever reappearing in social life so that young people are raised to respect and advocate human dignity all over the world.

³⁴ Micha Brumlik, »Erziehung nach ›Auschwitz‹ und Pädagogik der Menschenrechte: Eine Problemanzeige,« in »Erziehung nach Auschwitz« in der multikulturellen Gesellschaft: Pädagogische und soziologische Annäherungen (ed. B. Fechner, G. Köbler and T. Liebertz-Groß; Weinheim: Juventa-Verlag, 2000), 47–58, 49. Greenberg notes: »Muslims who feel that the event is a Western problem and that Christian guilt has been imposed on them have been tempted to try to stage a repeat performance. They lack the guilt and concern, and that in itself leads to guilt« (Greenberg, »Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire,« 106).

³⁵ Brumlik, »Erziehung nach ›Auschwitz‹ und Pädagogik der Menschenrechte,« 48.

Auschwitz symbolizes many other threats to civilization (and religious sensibilities) other than the sheer reality of the genocide which occurred there. But talking about genocide and the guilt of religious (and non-religious) people as such is an indispensable horizon for a multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic classroom experience. The key question to be asked is also the key question which leads into a Moslem perspective on theology after Auschwitz: do post-war citizen immigrants and their children, and even more recent migrants and their children share the diachronic and collective context and destiny of national guilt of all current Germans? Even if a nation is conceived as a voluntary boundary in a democratic sense, more like in the American than German understanding, citizen-nationality would seem to require some acceptance of one's adopted historical contexts – may they be guilt or freedom.³⁶

But in order to reconstruct educational efforts in a way Adorno suggests it will be necessary to involve students with their *own* ethnic, cultural and religious history under the horizon of universal human rights, which implies that the horrendous specifics of Auschwitz must share educational space with horrors committed elsewhere and at other times in history. Albeit: »who is not willing or disposed to accept massacres and genocides committed by their own collective background will not be able to apprehend what Auschwitz means for German people«. ³⁷ There will not be a collective responsibility for the future without the taking on of a collective responsibility for a shared human history. The dignity of every person must be a unifying figure for understanding the implications of human rights conventions. Pedagogical science should strive to do both: to underline the singular meaning of Auschwitz, on the one hand, and to find on the other a combining hermeneutical approach appropriate for a situation where a collective memory and responsibility is foundational for the future. This process is a valuable way to think analogically about a possible Moslem perspective on Auschwitz. Such a move in turn would be helpful in elucidating the failures of a philosophical theodicy that reduces suffering to an idea about God in himself, and thus to transfer the whole problem of evil and suffering into the relationship between the historical God and his creature man.

I ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF TALKING ABOUT GOD AFTER AUSCHWITZ

Surprisingly, it took quite a few years for philosophers, theologians, and historians to reflect on »Auschwitz« as a symbol of the Nazi system and of the attendant massacres in the years from 1933 to 1945.³⁸ »The theological responses came

³⁶ Brumlik, »Erziehung nach ›Auschwitz‹ und Pädagogik der Menschenrechte,« 50.

³⁷ Brumlik, »Erziehung nach ›Auschwitz‹ und Pädagogik der Menschenrechte,« 54.

³⁸ Morgan notes that the peak of works and reflections can be seen after the Six Day War in 1967. Unfortunately, he does not give any insight in this observation (Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 79).

years after the event, first in the late 1950s, then in the 1960s and early 1970s.«³⁹ Michael Morgan suggests distinguishing three periods when fragments and then answers about Auschwitz appeared: the early responses, those in the 1970's, those in the 1980's and finally the responses in Western culture in the late 1980's and the 1990's. In the following, I provide an overview summarizing some of Morgan's insights before I concentrate on two thinkers whose reflections are exemplary of others.

The views of Elizer Berkovits and Hans Jonas are two quite different Jewish answers to the question of how to talk about God after Auschwitz. They, along with the reflections of Johann-Baptiste Metz, started the German Roman Catholic re-examination of theology. My emphasis will, however, not be on Metz but on Thomas Pröpper, who tries to understand Metz's concerns while simultaneously keeping human and divine freedom more in focus. The Moslem perspective of course is unique, as already suggested, so of necessity Jewish and Christian contributions are central here. What is at issue is humanity questioning God's responsibility for his creatures, those made in his image and likeness in light of the slaughter of Auschwitz and all it represented.

The earliest responses were mostly Jewish and mostly negative in answering this question about divine responsibility in the light of Auschwitz. The perennial question of suffering and evil is the framework of the early writings of Elie Wiesel, who confronts the Jewish faith's »commitment to a covenantal God, a divine partner with historical responsibilities to protect and save his people«⁴⁰ and who proceeds to declare that his own faith was destroyed. Other Jewish (and Christian) thinkers like Richard Rubenstein, Emil Fackenheim, Eliezer Berkowits, Irving Greenberg, A. Roy Eckardt and Thomas Francis Little developed a vocabulary and the framework for the discussion of the issue of divine responsibility, but they evolved as well in their personal views over the years. Morgan points out that in setting the framework these thinkers also set the stage for each contributor to the discussion to define his or her own position many of which changed over the years.

Morgan also stresses both the transforming impact of the historical events and of the concept of the Shoah on philosophers and theologians. Although many started from a theoretical framework - for instance Rubenstein's theory derives from Freud, existential philosophy and many other approaches - they tended to abandon eventually much of modern philosophy and theology in the search for answers. Tellingly, both Roy Eckardt, as a Christian, and Richard Rubenstein as a Jewish thinker, exposed their thoughts to the »necessity of historicity.«⁴¹ Eckhardt goes so far as to argue that everything traditional about theology is nego-

³⁹ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 5.

⁴⁰ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 79.

⁴¹ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 81.

tiable in light of Auschwitz in order for »a[n] honest, authentic post-Holocaust Christian Theology to maintain its integrity.«⁴²

While the early answers struggled to find a position towards Auschwitz which might be more than negative, in the 1970's and 1980's the centrality of Auschwitz intensified along with a strong movement towards historicism.⁴³ Morgan notes his surprise that after all is said and done, the extent of Jewish answers »to the enterprise of rethinking Judaism after Auschwitz«⁴⁴ is slim, while there has been an »extensive and serious Christian reflection.«⁴⁵ The events of the Holocaust, and the expanded conversation in Western culture – not just in Germany – that developed during the 1980's and 1990's became a »persisting trauma«⁴⁶ which seemingly lay underneath other topics, discussions and actions, as a subtext always ready to break out into consciousness. »These moments of engagement have temporarily transported the Holocaust from the book review sections of our journals and magazines to their featured articles and editorials, from the ›Holocaust‹ shelves of our bookstores to their prominent display tables, from occasional news items in the papers and on television to the front pages and the featured editorial programs.«⁴⁷

Responses to the Holocaust occurred together or in conjunction with these mass-media phenomena. The quest for intelligibility in postmodernity moves rapidly aided by technology and is highly motivated to find among widely dispersed figures points of intersection which can feed critically reflective thinking. But in an age when questioning everything is fashionable, the Holocaust emerged and remains an (if not the) absolute point for ethical decision-making. In Germany and elsewhere numerous events in the late 1980's and 1990's intensified the centrality of the Holocaust as a rubric for theology. The rise of historicism in academia and controversies about how to read the events of history⁴⁸ (which began in the Enlightenment), disagreements about the role German philosophical historicism might have played in the rise of Nazism, as well as the collapse of the East German government, along with the rest of the Soviet bloc contributed to an even greater emphasis of thinking about world-historical events as a necessary basis for theo-

⁴² Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 82.

⁴³ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 160f.

⁴⁴ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 161.

⁴⁵ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 161

⁴⁶ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 271.

⁴⁷ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 271.

⁴⁸ Morgan reminds us about the so called »Historikerstreit« in which in 1986/87 the singularity of the Holocaust was controversially debated by historians and philosophers in West Germany. In the midst of this debate the question was raised whether the German role was a more reactive role and not the active one, a question which led to a long and very emotional debate, with Jürgen Habermas as one of the prominent opponents of this question taking part in.

logical reflection than the two great wars of the twentieth century had already done. »What do the death camps tell us about our Enlightenment conception of human nature, about modern society and culture, about modern social sciences?«⁴⁹ Is this key question still alive?

1. Jewish responses: »What is the matter with God?«

Jewish thoughts about Auschwitz are diverse and unique in many ways, so I will not attempt to give even an overview here. My choice is at once personal and theological, for I want to engage first the challenges of Jewish thinking with those discussed by Christian theologians, eventually introducing Moslem thinking, and thus to prompt a »consecutive dialogue«.

While Hans Jonas asks – following Kant’s critics – »what is the matter with God,«⁵⁰ Eliezer Berkovits underlines that the proper question to ask should be »whether, after Auschwitz, the Jewish people may still be witnesses to God’s elusive presence in history as we understand the concept?«⁵¹ Without dismissing the tremendous cruelty of the Holocaust, Berkovits understands Jewish history to be more than Auschwitz; it does not contain the entire history of Israel. God is the »Hiding of the Face«⁵² and at the same time the present God. »Notwithstanding Auschwitz, the life of the patriarchs is still with him; the Exodus did not turn into a mirage; Sinai has not come tumbling down; the prophets have not become charlatans; the return from Babylon had not proved to be a fairy tale.«⁵³ For the faithful Jew, Auschwitz is a problem of faith. Berkovits emphasizes the idea of history in describing Israel’s God, recalling him as being present and absent but always the God of the covenant.

Still, there must be a place for justice for innocent, suffering people and God cannot be excused for seeming to have failed to provide it. »God is responsible for having created a world in which man is free to make history.«⁵⁴ Berkovits’ faith expresses the trust that there will be a final justification and the transformation of history, while his theology also understands God as free within his history – for that is what it is – and humanity as the free counterpart to God. Whether the price for creating this freedom is too high is a question which leads into the very depths of theological reflection.

⁴⁹ Morgan, *A Holocaust Reader*, 274.

⁵⁰ Hans Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,« in *A Holocaust Reader. Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (ed. M. M. Morgan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 259–70, 60.

⁵¹ Eliezer Berkovits, »Faith after the Holocaust,« in *A Holocaust Reader. Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (ed. M. M. Morgan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 96–102, 98.

⁵² Berkovits, »Faith after the Holocaust,« 100.

⁵³ Berkovits, »Faith after the Holocaust,« 100.

⁵⁴ Berkovits, »Faith after the Holocaust,« 100 f.

By contrast, Hans Jonas scrutinizes the fundamental attributes of God to determine if it is any longer possible to think of God. For him, even the questions raised by Job – where theodicy is first verbalized – cannot readily be applied to Auschwitz for they are useless in the face of its enormity. Job's laments fail to capture the absolute singularity of the deliberate, rationally constructed, technologically sophisticated plan conceived by some of those created in the image and likeness of God's to annihilate millions and millions of others who are also his people. »Nothing of this is still in use in dealing with the event for which ›Auschwitz‹ has become the symbol.«⁵⁵ God is the Lord of history and this calls the entire traditional concept of God into question: if he is the Lord of History, why did he let Auschwitz happen?

Jonas' line of argument is very stringent: he argues that because Auschwitz adds to the »Jewish historical experience something unprecedented and of a nature no longer assimilable by the old theological categories,«⁵⁶ one has either to give up the concept of God altogether, or one has to *rethink* God in a way that God remains thinkable after all. Jonas rethinks God in terms of the recurring myth of the becoming God, the God who is not sheer being in itself, which then makes it possible to think of a suffering, becoming, caring God.⁵⁷ God must be understood as an »endangered God. God who runs a risk.«⁵⁸ If one looks at the imperfect world – one wounded by evil and suffering – two positions in the range of possible theodicies emerge: God either does not exist, or that God has *given up* some of his agency to a power or person out of himself who is invested with the right and freedom to act. In consequence the God of the scriptures is not an omnipotent God at all. On the other hand, theodicies that emphasize the absolute power of God are also self-contradictory; they contradict the absolute beneficence of God, and they presuppose that there are others for God to act on, which seemingly limits the divine power.

If the notion of absolute power has illogical implications, why think of God in this term at all?⁵⁹ For Jonas power is a relational concept, one which when applied to God requires that he be thought differently than has been the tradition; now God has to be thought irretrievably in relation to his creatures and their history. The key question for Jonas is evidently the integrative power of the divine attributes. How can God be thought to have omnipotence, goodness and intelligibility after Auschwitz?⁶⁰ »The question is: Which attributes are truly integral to our concept of God, and which, being of lesser force, must give way to their superior

⁵⁵ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 260.

⁵⁶ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 261.

⁵⁷ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 261–65.

⁵⁸ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 265.

⁵⁹ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 265.

⁶⁰ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 266.

claim?«⁶¹ After Auschwitz, an omnipotent God would either have to be not good or totally unintelligible. Since God remained silent during the Holocaust, divine omnipotence must be given up. And this is Jonas' key conclusion about God: »not because he chose not to, but because he *could* not intervene did he fail to intervene.«⁶² Jonas is talking about God's »self limitation through the creation from nothing«⁶³ as the reason for his »self-restriction«⁶⁴ in history.⁶⁵

Jonas' position was criticized in Jewish circles, of course, but here I want to move on Protestant and Catholic attempts to save the omnipotence of God from his critique. Without doubt, the struggle to preserve a more traditional concept of God which is still thinkable after Auschwitz asks for our esteem. Hence, I will have to discuss the price for any giving up of the omnipotence of God.

2. Christian struggle: »God had trusted us«

Why not follow Jonas? He has been seen as offering the most serious and ethical response on behalf of those who were murdered screaming to the silent God. Eberhard Jüngel, a Protestant Theologian from Tübingen, was one of those who partially supported Jonas' twin approach of conceiving God and yet criticizing him.⁶⁶ Jüngel appreciates Jonas' effort to combine respect for the historical experience of the silent God with the hard labor of conceptualizing an idea of this God as he is in himself. In light of the historical fact of Auschwitz, Jonas indeed tried to reconsider divine creation in a way that remains theological/historically respectable.⁶⁷ He does not want to give up the faith that God is the creator, but he argues that in creating the world he undergoes a kenosis of omnipotence, a kenosis of self-re-

⁶¹ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 266.

⁶² Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 267.

⁶³ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 267.

⁶⁴ Jonas, »The concept of God after Auschwitz,« 268.

⁶⁵ The theological idea of »God's self-restriction« in creation was first thought by L. de Molina in his epoch-making book: *Liberi arbitrii cum gratiae donis, divina praescientia, providentia, praedestinatione et reprobatione concordia* (ed. Johannes Rabeneck; Oniae, 1953); citation by: Michael Greiner, »Gottes wirksame Gnade und menschliche Freiheit. Wiederaufnahme eines verdrängten Schlüsselproblems,« in *Theologische Anthropologie II* (ed. T. Pröpper; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2011), 1351–1436, 1380. Molina, who was able to think human freedom as self-ascertained, understood God's freedom as a freedom of self-restriction in creation in order to give room for created human being and created freedom. This modus of creation is at the same time origin of the specific divinely ordained dignity of mankind. Of course Molina would not have thought God to give up his omnipotence in creating man as free.

⁶⁶ Eberhard Jüngel, »Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung,« in *Wertlose Wahrheit* (ed. E. Jüngel; Munich: Kaiser; 1990), 151–162.

⁶⁷ Jüngel, »Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung,« 155 f.

striction from history; because of this kenotic self-restriction he *could not* intervene in history.

This key conclusion is connected with the question of theodicy and points to a major argument Jüngel makes against Jonas' theology. Although from an existential point of view, the idea of God as an »endangered« God is understandable and pointed, it is also true that in scripture God »risks« his power in both New and Old Testaments narratives. One can say that God's trust in his elected people in the Hebrew Testament is repeatedly broken, as the prophets amply report, just as one can say that it was broken in the death of Jesus in the New Testament accounts. Hans Urs von Balthasar has made this point in his *Theo-drama*. But if God has given his own being into the created world and cannot be expected to give anything further (in order to save the intelligibility and goodness of God), then humanity now has to give back to God.⁶⁸ And if God does not have anything more to pour into man's history to stop the carnage, can he still be forgiven?⁶⁹ Is he still responsible, despite his kenotic self-restriction?⁷⁰

In post-war German Catholic Theology there is a strong impetus to maintain the omnipotence of God without wanting to put his ultimate goodness at risk, and without having to think about the implicit possibility of injustice this strategy implies. German Catholic Theologian and Professor in Muenster, Johann-Baptiste Metz was the first to call this dual strategy into question by defining the following criterion for evaluating theology: »Ask yourselves if the theology you are learning is such that it could remain unchanged before and after Auschwitz. If this is the case, be on your guard!«⁷¹ In Metz's mind, this demanding criterion applies to every kind of theological tract since it encompasses reflections on all the attributes of God who is simple and not compound, and which therefore cannot be separated from each other as they could be in talking about human attributes.

Metz is right; theology does have to make the strenuous effort to rethink theology after Auschwitz. Thomas Pröpper, a prominent Roman Catholic theologian – also Professor in Muenster – in Germany, also does not want to follow Jonas' viewpoint. With the idea that God is becoming and not pure act/pure being (the latter

⁶⁸ Jüngel, »Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung,« 158. At this point, Jüngel continues his critic with the Christian hermeneutics of incarnation as the place of revelation and the possibility to think God as both: omnipotent and loving. I will not continue with this specific critic for I am not convinced that this will give the important insights this topic needs.

⁶⁹ Jüngel, »Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung,« 160.

⁷⁰ Striet, »Versuch über die Auflehnung. Philosophisch-theologische Überlegungen zur Theodizeefrage,« 50.

⁷¹ Johann Baptist Metz, »Christians and Jews after Auschwitz: Being a Meditation Also on the End of Bourgeois Religion,« in *A Holocaust Reader. Responses to the Nazi Extermination* (ed. M. M. Morgan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 238–50, 246.

of which being what Jonas must deny), every hope for justice is thrown back to the *aporia* of anthropodicy.⁷² For Pröpper, the danger in Jonas' perspective is that anthropodicy replaces theodicy and the problem of evil and suffering only becomes more intractable; now humanity, which could not restrain its unjust actions is expected to resolve this injustice. If God cannot give anything more, for he has already given everything, then who is left to countenance the cry for justice? Thus Pröpper wants to cleave to the omnipotence of God.

He argues as follows. *First*, God's omnipotence can be thought as his goodness which created and respects man's freedom in history. This history is an »open« one, one in which God does not over-determine or necessitate its unfolding narrative. For Pröpper, however, the release of man into his history of freedom is limited, since, though God does not self-restrict – thus leaving man in charge of this history – neither does he necessitate man's free actions. In his account, neither God nor man is fully in charge. And this implies at least some restriction on the attributes of the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God's *creatio ex nihilo*, which it would seem he continues to countenance. Thus questions of theodicy are alive again.

But, on the other hand, if God is thought of as having created everything out of nothing, God is also thought to be the one omnipotent Being, which means to be different in being from humanity and the world he created. This difference is necessary in order to retain but not compromise either the freedom of God or of humanity. Pröpper tries to resolve this dilemma by arguing that *creatio ex nihilo* does not undermine God's omnipotence; it is a sign of his omnipotence. Humanity's freedom, given by God, is a sign not of divine self-restriction but of divine all-powerfulness and, one might say, of divine self-confidence. This move is intended to mitigate the apparently unresolvable dilemmas of Christian theodicy.

Second, God has to be conceived as the One who *wanted* to start a truly »free history.« The willingness of God to start a free history amounts to a very different God from Jonas' tragic God, who in order to be thought after Auschwitz has to be held accountable for a history in which he is so involved that he can only be conceived as a becoming God without his own freedom. But it must be said that if Pröpper's God of a free history expresses his omnipotence in love, in being free himself and in respecting the freedom of his creatures, he raises the questions of theodicy again.

Third, Christian theology consequently must conceive the free self-expression of God in history within a Trinitarian concept which simultaneously allows thinking about God *in se* in terms of unconditional love and freedom. Thus, for Pröpper, the traditional Catholic Trinitarian theology of the interaction of triune immanence and economy reappears. Since God is *ad intra* already and always original freedom and love, he can be thought to be so sure about his loving power

⁷² Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich. Notizen zur Theodizee,« 272.

and omnipotence that he risks *ad extra* the history of freedom. Even though God cannot predict the denouement of history because of human freedom, he seems to trust his ability to win everyone over to his side, the side of justice, in the end.

However, *fourth* and finally, God set history and human freedom in a way that this end, the finishing of the creation, does not depend only on his power and beneficence. This is Thomas Pröpper's key point in thinking about theology after Auschwitz. Because God is unconditional freedom and love, even in the face of immeasurable suffering, God continues to sustain created humanity with freedom. God agreed to accept and respect this freedom up to the end of time. This means that it must be conceivable that God will respect human freedom even during the last judgment. Thus God cannot forgive the perpetrators of immeasurable suffering, (who are also made in his image and likeness), if the victims do not agree to forgive. God might trust his own overwhelming love and mercy in the moment of recognition during the last judgment, but he cannot ignore much less about the freedom of the victim to pass (or not pass) a loving judgment also after an entire history of freedom has been lived.⁷³

This final point tries to resolve the theodicean question in two ways. *First*, it makes the assignment of responsibility an eschatological event and not an ordinary historical one, thus relieving both God and humanity from having to assign and accept responsibility in what will always be a deeply troubled (fallen) temporality; in effect it gives everyone a chance to reconcile freely. *Second*, it makes God and human beings – especially the victims – co-sharers in the final judgment about responsibility for suffering. Presumably, in an eschatological setting the victims also get to accuse God for his silence and complicity, if their freedom so motivates them. This is an image in which God is put on trial, one that Elie Wiesel uses in his trilogy, the first volume of which is *Night*.

There is a question here that Romano Guardini wanted to ask God after his death. He wanted to know why there had to be so many detours for salvation, so much suffering of the innocent, so much guilt. He expected an answer, though we do not know what it was. Ivan Karamazov's answer, articulated by Fyodor Dostoevsky, in the *Brothers Karamazov*, is very clear: future harmony is not worth the tears of one innocent child and even if the child forgives his tormentor, the mother is not allowed to do so.⁷⁴ »Guardini's hopeful question and Ivan Karamazov's rejecting answer mark the alternatives to which the transformation of the problematic of theodicy comes down to after the failure of human beings to resolve the issue of historical responsibility of the silent God. These alternatives compel us

⁷³ Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich. Notizen zur Theodizee,« 274 f.; Striet, »Versuch über die Auflehnung,« and many more, recently Gunda Werner, *Die Freiheit der Vergebung. Eine freiheitstheoretische Reflexion auf die Prärogative Gottes im sakramentalen Bußgeschehen*, (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2016).

⁷⁴ Pröpper, »Fragende und Gefragte zugleich,« 273 f.

to ask ourselves: can we trust God's love to ultimately justify itself and to win the acceptance of all, or should we decide to deny this possibility in the face of unacceptable suffering and guilt which cannot be reconciled. Both options have to justify themselves practically.⁷⁵

3. Islamic discourse: the justice of God and the freedom of mankind

The hitherto sparse Moslem approach to the theodicean meaning of Auschwitz theologially leads to a consideration of key terms and figures like suffering, the questioning God, God's justice and mercy, and the last judgment. Because of the paucity of material I will resort to what little has been said in the West and connect this with modern and contemporary experience to discover whatever combining Abrahamic roots exist in order to deduce a Moslem reflection on Auschwitz. This can only be a fragmentary exercise here, though it may hopefully encourage Moslem theologians to elaborate a more proper Moslem approach.

Navid Kermani is the only German speaking Islamic and orientalist scholar who talks theologially about the Shoah, and he does so in the context of the Book of Job. In his recently published book, *The Terror of God: Attar, Job and the Metaphysical Revolt*,⁷⁶ he describes a history of what he calls »Contra-Theology« in which he discusses the questions raised by Job in the Jewish tradition and especially during and after the Holocaust. His unusual and complex approach is focused on this »Contra-Theology«. He analyzes many testimonies of Jewish victims and describes his personal, deeply touched reaction to their unbroken faith in the midst of a horrifying life in the concentration camps. He recognizes that the question of God was not asked by these faithful people who were able to keep their inner resistance to the Nazi strategy of dehumanization and death because they continued to trust in God. On the other hand, he also acknowledges that the theological question of God had to be raised by Jewish thinkers reacting to Auschwitz.⁷⁷

In his research he comes to a surprising conclusion: Jewish intellectuals sought for answers to their suffering in their written tradition about this suffering. Within these historical resources, however, evidence of the history of Islamic suffering can also be found to have coexisted along with Jewish suffering, and so a certain »kinship of suffering« is thinkable. Kermani understands the questioning of God as one collective experience⁷⁸, especially in the figure of Job.⁷⁹ Here, unlike in the case of Hans Jonas, the story of Job still resonates. Kermani points out that

⁷⁵ Ibid., 275.

⁷⁶ Navid Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes. Attar, Hiob und die metaphysische Revolte* (Munich: Beck, 2005).

⁷⁷ Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes*, 267.

⁷⁸ Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes*, 269.

⁷⁹ Kermani, *Der Schrecken Gottes*, 271.

in Islamic theology the question of theodicy is bound directly to the figure of Satan, who is the one who accuses God of impotence in the face of injustice.

The figure of Satan, indeed, marks one of the fundamental differences between Christian and Moslem belief. In the Islamic tradition generally the Arch-enemy (Iblis) refused to obey God. After God created Adam, God told all angels to bow in front of him. Iblis did not respond to the call of God, which was a refusal to acknowledge all that he had done in creating man. The first sin in Moslem tradition is the denial of human existence and dignity.⁸⁰ Adam, as a matter of fact, is not the first sinner, but the first *prophet*, for he was able to discern the creation of God and to repent after his disobedience – eating from the tree. Consequently, man is created without sin in Islamic tradition, but with reason, freedom and agency.⁸¹

The dominant theological school up to the present – today, in Sunni-Islam, the Asch'aritic school – follows a different idea of humanity. For it, God is omnipotent, not bound to the causal laws of nature, and the agency of humankind is lost in favor of an arbitrary God.⁸² Nevertheless, as Austrian Professor for Islamic Theology in Münster, Mouhanad Khorchide, rightly recognizes there is another very ancient tradition which is having a renewed impact in Moslem theology and science today: the Mu'tazila school, older than the former one (around 1000), in which rational reflection on God and humanity is permitted, even encouraged.⁸³ This more philosophical school conducts its reflections based on five principles: the unity of God, divine justice, God's unchanging promises and threats, the middle position, and God's demand that his creatures do the right and are forbidden from doing wrong.⁸⁴

Very important in the Mu'tazila school also is the idea of the compatibility of the freedom of God and humankind. God is also thought *to be* mercy, not only to *have* mercy.⁸⁵ His justice is to be understood within his merciful nature. Human-

⁸⁰ Mouhanad Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit. Grundzüge einer modernen Religion* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2012), 99 f.

⁸¹ Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit*, 85–87; 98 f.

⁸² Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit*, 36–39.

⁸³ This school owes its renewal to the growing interest in a more rational approach and with an engagement with modern philosophy's integrative thinking, and in 1951/52 the discovery of books written by one of the famous scholars in its tradition: 'Abd al-Gabbar (935–1024). See: Anja Middelbeck-Varwick, *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch: Erkundungen zur Theodizee in Islam und Christentum* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2009), 241.

⁸⁴ Middelbeck-Varwick, *Die Grenze zwischen Gott und Mensch*, 247.

⁸⁵ Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit*, 31. Gunda Werner, »Der Mensch zwischen Heilsbestimmtheit und Erlösungsbedürftigkeit. Ein muslimisch-christlicher Dialog über die Barmherzigkeit Gottes«, in *Streitfall Erlösung* (ed. K. von Stosch and A. Langenfeld; Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), 173–93.

ity is responsible for its deeds and has to assume responsibility before God and before the victims of its unjust doings. Humanity *has* freedom and moreover, he too *is* free. Its freedom is thought to be unconditional, and more than the freedom of choice. Khorchide, like Pröpper, is able to keep the question of justice and suffering open, not to assign responsibility in history overly quickly, but to reflect on the last judgment as a place of transformation.⁸⁶

He draws a picture of God and humankind which takes the achievements of the Mu'tazila school seriously and reframes them within some modern insights of philosophy. Humanity is responsible for what it does, for it is free. It has to be thought free, for God created it with freedom and if God is mercy, he wants his free creation to be finalized in freedom in heaven. He knows that sins which are the consequences of unconditional freedom, not of a fallen nature, have to be redeemed and that victims have to participate in the overall forgiveness that is required in the eschaton. In revealing his love everyone is invited to find the way back to where humanity came from: to God.

In summary, according to Mouhanad Khorchide, theology after Auschwitz has to define the dignity of every person according to their human rights. It has to transfer the insights of the rational Mu'tazila school to the relation between God and humanity in order to understand history as free and God's mercy as unconditional.⁸⁷ It will have to keep Job's questions open and allow space for the questioning of God.

II THE RISK OF AN OPEN HISTORY

The notion of the risk of an open history seems to be a possible connecting point between the three Abrahamic religions. While there is still and has been for some time an intensive Christian-Jewish dialogue, and a rather young Christian-Moslem one about theological questions, a theological triologue is quite rare at this point. In consequence, a consecutive triologue will have to suffice, wherein Jewish-Christian questions are discussed and Moslem views are considered separately. Because of the differences in the doctrine of God this triologue has to find its own foundations; neither Judaism nor Islam can base their participation on belief in the figure of a triune God any more than Christianity can settle for non-Trinitarian monotheism as the basis for its participation, and as we have seen, even the figure of Abraham is not easily appropriated in a combining sense. However, sev-

⁸⁶ Khorchide, *Islam ist Barmherzigkeit*, 47-56.

⁸⁷ This of course marks a fundamental difference between Christian and Islamic believe: the unconditional love is a »Denkform« which is the hermeneutical key to understand God as a Triune God and to be able to describe the relationship between God and Man in terms of freedom. Denying unconditional love in order to save the unity and freedom of God would have to be the topic of a Christian-Islamic Discourse which could be in the first step even a philosophical one.

eral connecting themes can be identified as parts of paradigm for theology after Auschwitz. Very briefly they would be the following: Job's questions are alive, they are asked in an existential, spiritual, liturgical and theological way alone and in a community. God is the creator of the world and he created humankind as his free counterpart. He takes over the risk of an open history. The three religions reflect on the high price of freedom and draw each in its own way different consequences. Both Jewish and Christian theologians understand Auschwitz as the turning point in history and in doing theology. Young German Moslem Theology has not yet reflected on the Holocaust. It would have to transform its previous experiences with suffering into a theological concept analogous to what the educational sciences are doing in confronting the problem of how to educate those young people who for one reason or another have no connection to the tragedy of Auschwitz. God is mercy and justice. He judges the perpetrators but respects the freedom of the victims. The figure of Abraham is conjoining if we focus on the fact that in his covenant with God, a multi-dimensional and blessed ethical community is invoked. This requires us to lessen the distinction Paul makes between the inheritors of Abrahams' seed (the Hebrews) and the inheritors of Abraham's faith (the followers of Jesus Christ). The idea of hospitality, which originates in the very region from which all three Abrahamic religions derive, and is scripturally and culturally emphasized to this day, has obvious post-Auschwitz theological implications. This is the hospitality of God for his people, and a call for it to be extended by and among all his peoples, especially the stranger. Finally, it is worth noting that the eschatological dimension of the problem of theodicy is central to the notion of an »open history,« especially one in which God the judge wants the victims created by the freedom he gave his created peoples to share in his judgment. Here the victim gets to appear before the bar of justice to stand for condemnation or forgiveness of the perpetrator and if needs to be to accuse God.

What is left? *First*, it is remembrance. Elie Wiesel was very sure that »if anything can, it is memory that will save humanity.«⁸⁸ Once a dialogue is started, one can hope for the common realization that the »most important insight is that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all contain teachings and traditions that, if remembered and practiced, can transform human existence by giving priority to hospitality.«⁸⁹ Theology after Auschwitz is about remembering and transforming, about listening to the outcry of victims and taking seriously what Shi'i Islam very strongly emphasizes: »God treats human beings with justice and wants them to deal with each other justly and establish justice in society. The issue of divine justice is not merely theological, for it has clear and significant practical implica-

⁸⁸ Quoted by: Leonard Grob and John K. Roth, »Epilogue. What should be remembered?,« in *Encountering the stranger. A Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (ed. L. Grob, J. K. Roth; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012), 260.

⁸⁹ Leonard Grob and John K. Roth, »Epilogue. What should be remembered?,« 262.

tions. All prophets were sent to establish social justice.«⁹⁰ Guardini's question and Ivan Karamazov's answer are not the only two paths available to decide in the light of our faith and life in order to answer Jonas' question: What is the matter with God?

⁹⁰ Shomali, *Shi'i-Islam*, 142.