

**SOCIO-HISTORICAL EXAMINATION
OF RELIGION AND MINISTRY:
A JOURNAL OF THE GLOBAL CENTER
FOR RELIGIOUS RESEARCH**



Copyright © 2022

www.shermjournal.org

ISSN 2637-7519 (print)
ISSN 2637-7500 (online)
ISBN 979-8-9857300-0-5 (print)
ISBN 979-8-9857300-1-2 (eBook)

GCCR Press
1312 17th Street Suite 549
Denver, CO 80202
www.gccr.org

*Printed copies of this issue are
available for purchase on the GCCR
website at: www.gccr.org/products*

Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry (SHERM Journal) is a biannual (not-for-profit) peer-reviewed academic journal that publishes the latest social-scientific, historiographic, and ecclesiastic research on religious institutions and their ministerial practices. SHERM is dedicated to the critical and scholarly inquiry of historical and contemporary religious phenomena, both from within particular religious traditions and across cultural boundaries, so as to inform the broader socio-historical analysis of religion and its related fields of study.

The purpose of SHERM Journal is to provide a scholarly medium for the social-scientific study of religion where specialists can publish advanced studies on religious trends, theologies, rituals, philosophies, socio-political influences, or experimental and applied ministry research in the hopes of generating enthusiasm for the vocational and academic study of religion while fostering collegiality among religion specialists. Its mission is to provide academics, professionals, and nonspecialists with critical reflections and evidence-based insights into the socio-historical study of religion and, where appropriate, its implications for ministry and expressions of religiosity.

General Editor:
Darren M. Slade, PhD

Editorial Advisory Board:
Abimbola A. Adelakun, PhD
Abbas Aghdassi, PhD
Gbenga Emmanuel Afolayan, MA
Peter Antoci, PhD
Robert Gregory Cavin, PhD
Mike Clawson, PhD
Sandra Cohen, MaHL
Carlos Colombetti, PhD
Jack David Eller, PhD
Evan Fales, PhD
Anthony Gill, PhD
Ken Howard, MDiv, MED
Mark A. Moore, PhD
Josfin Raj S.B, MDiv, ThM
Elisa Robyn, PhD

Typesetter/Copyeditor:
Christian Farren

Editorial Advisory Board

SHERM journal is a division of the non-profit organization, the FaithX Project, and therefore receives endowments from FaithX to maintain a significant presence within academia and the broader faith community. Nonetheless, the journal is overseen by an independent, religiously unaffiliated Editorial Advisory Board to ensure the content of the published articles meet stringent standards of critical scholarship uninfluenced by theological or ideological allegiances.

Copyright Privileges

When publishing an article through SHERM, authors are able to retain copyright privileges over their research. As part of the rights agreement, however, all authors wishing to publish their research through SHERM must transfer exclusive licensing rights over to SHERM, thereby granting SHERM the right to claim the article as part of its publishing proprietary corpus. Authors retain copyright credit for the article while SHERM becomes the sole publisher of the material. Because SHERM is a non-restrictive licensing publication, authors (as copyright owners of their research) are allowed to share and repost their article on any platform of their choosing.

As partners with SHERM, upon acceptance and publication of an article, authors are automatically granted the right to share, disseminate, use, and repost their article in any way they deem necessary to expand the visibility of their publication. Likewise, authors retain all intellectual property rights, including the specific research content and data employed throughout the article, as well as the right to retain attribution rights as the article's original creator and writer.

Licensing Transfer

As the sole licensee of all the articles, SHERM retains the exclusive right to publish, distribute, or transfer the license of an article to other third parties for private and commercial purposes. SHERM reserves the right to create and authorize the commercial use of all published articles.

In order to make the articles available to as many audiences and researchers as possible, SHERM reserves the right to post (and repost even after initial publication of) all articles in any form or media as allowable by the newest technological developments. Currently, this means SHERM will post all articles to numerous open access websites and social media platforms. SHERM also reserves the right to advertise the publication of any article through various mediums.

By transferring exclusive licensing rights to SHERM, authors agree to the following stipulations:

- Authors cannot republish their article (either in English or in another language) with a different academic journal (without express consent from SHERM).
- Authors who repost their article online must incorporate a citation that indicates SHERM as the publisher of the content (including a link to the original article on the SHERM website, as well as the volume and issue number).
- Authors who wish to use portions of the article for other publications or work must cite the original SHERM publication.
- SHERM is granted authorization to impose copyright infringements laws, as well as combat instances of plagiarism against third parties on behalf of the author(s).

No part of this journal or issue may be used, copied, or reproduced in any manner without written permission from the editors except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles, reviews, and other scholarly publications. In accordance with the "fair use" agreement of Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107 of the US Copyright Act, the following permissions are granted for the express purposes of teaching, research, and scholarship: **Reproduction**—authors and readers can make multiple copies of individual articles without profit. **Distribution**—authors and readers can distribute and publicly display individual articles without profit. Opinions and conclusions expressed in SHERM are those of the individual article authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Advisory Board, the FaithX Project, or other affiliated partners. For questions or permissions, contact the SHERM editorial staff: shermeditor@gmail.com.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOL. 4, No. 1
SUMMER 2022

HOLOCAUST STUDIES

The Shoah and Jewish Faith: Voices from the Midst of Tragedy <i>Kenneth L. Hanson</i>	1
The Danger of Cultural Erasure in Inter-Ethnic, Inter-Religious, Trans-National Rescue During Genocide: A Comparison of the Shoah and the Bosnian Civil War <i>Elyse Pierce</i>	16
Nazi Decontextualization of the Bible <i>Jason Hensley</i>	30
Shoah Education: The Indian Scenario <i>Mehak Burza</i>	46
Islamic Jihad and the Holocaust: From Hitler to Hamas <i>David Patterson</i>	60
Free Will, the Holocaust, and The Problem of Evil <i>David Kyle Johnson</i>	81
An “Italian Citizen of Jewish Race”: Primo Levi on Belief, Blasphemy and Becoming a Jew <i>Morgan Rempel</i>	98

HISTORICAL JESUS

A New Paradigm for the Study of Christian Origins: Replacing the Dendritic Model <i>Frank R. Zindler</i>	114
--	-----

TABLE OF CONTENTS
-CONTINUED-

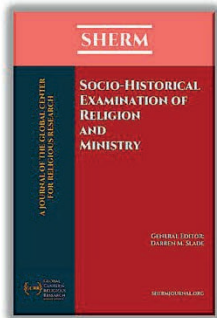
VOL. 4, No. 1
SUMMER 2022

MINISTRY RESEARCH

- In the Synagogue, in the Streets, on the Aeropagus: Kerygma and Dialogue
with Reference to Acts 17 154
Tommaso Manzon

BOOK REVIEWS

- Varieties of Jesus Mythicism* Edited by John W. Loftus and Robert M. Price 171
Richard Carrier



CALL FOR PAPERS!
SOCIAL-SCIENCES
HUMANITIES
PHILOSOPHY
MINISTRY

Submit Proposal

GCRR and SHERM Journal are accepting submission proposals for the following fields of study:

- Religious History
 - Historical Theology
 - Historical Jesus
 - Psychology of Religion
 - Sociology of Religion
 - Anthropology of Religion
 - Philosophy of Religion
 - Religious Trends and Demographics
 - Issues in Contemporary Theology
 - Ancient, Medieval, and Contemporary Christian Literature
 - Patristic, Medieval, and Contemporary Exegesis
 - Ancient Near Eastern Languages and Writings
 - Ancient Israelite Religion and Second Temple Judaism
 - History and Literature of Contemporary Judaism
 - Hebrew Bible
 - New Testament
 - Textual Criticism
 - Islamic Studies
 - Mormon Studies
 - Native American Religion
 - Hinduism, Buddhism, and Other World Religions
 - Historical and Contemporary Religious Revivals and Sects
 - New Religious Movements (Cults)
 - Religious Violence
 - Religious Liberty
 - Freedom from Religion
 - General Religious Studies
- Ministry Research:
- Ancient, Medieval, and Contemporary Ministry Practices
 - Experimental Faith Communities
 - Ecclesiastical Trends and Issues
 - Economic, Political, Social, and Ecological Issues in Ministry
 - Ethical, Racial, Sexual, and Gender Issues in Ministry
 - Case Studies / Case Reports

The Shoah and Jewish Faith: Voices from the Midst of Tragedy

*A Paper Presented at the
International eConference on Religion and the Holocaust*

Kenneth L. Hanson,
University of Central Florida

Abstract: *There has understandably been a good deal of emphasis on how Jewish faith has been affected in the wake of the genocidal catastrophe of the Shoah. Much less attention has been devoted, however, to how observant Jews were impacted, with regard to their faith, in the midst of the tragedy. Elie Wiesel, for his part, was said to have put God on trial at Auschwitz. It will also be instructive to consider two Jewish leaders, both ultra-orthodox rabbis, who were victims of the Nazi genocide. Their perspectives (unlike post-Holocaust theology) provide a window on Jewish thought while events were unfolding. The reflections of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, who was residing in Warsaw at the outbreak of the war, were published in Israel in 1960 under the title Esh Kodesh. The work elucidates what may be viewed as a normative theology of suffering. Another ultra-orthodox rabbi, Yissachar Teichtal, was living in Budapest during the Nazi era. His theology is even more dramatic, rejecting all exilic philosophies, and developing a religious Zionist philosophy. If there is a to be found a merging of the two approaches, it is in the idea of “reconstruction,” on the one hand of the individual, and on the other, of the Jewish nation – the uniquely Jewish concept of tikkun.*

Keywords: Shoah, Holocaust, Theology of Suffering, Religious Zionism, Judaism

The Experience of Observant Jews

When it comes to modern approaches toward religious conviction, God and spirituality, the Shoah has arguably changed everything. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once queried:

And what about my faith...? I would be within my rights to give it up. I could invoke six million reasons to justify my decision. But I don't. I am incapable of straying from the path charted by my ancestors. Without this faith in God, the faith of my father and forefathers, my faith in Israel and in

humanity would be diminished. And so I choose to preserve the faith of my childhood.¹

He also observed, regarding the future of humanity itself in a post-Shoah environment:

... to bring a child into this world was a very great act of faith, for we had all the reasons in the world to give up - to give up on man ... But we did not ... We decided to wager on man and God.²

It is of course pertinent to ask: How has the Jewish people's faith been affected, beyond the Shoah. What is seldom considered, however, is the question of how observant Jews managed to cope with matters of faith in the midst of the tragedy. In this regard, it will be constructive to reflect on the experience of two Jewish leaders, both ultra-orthodox rabbis, and practitioners of the mystical movement in Judaism known as Kabbalah. They are important because they provide religious responses to the Holocaust, not after the fact, but while it was in progress. In contrast with post-Holocaust theology, which clearly has the benefit of hindsight, they provide a unique window on Jewish thought from victims of the genocide.

Holy Fire

After the outbreak of World War II on September 1, 1939, the entire infrastructure of Polish Jewry was being shattered by the relentless Nazi bombing of Warsaw. In due course, Ultra-Orthodox Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira began writing a compilation of weekly sermons to his students that could well be called a theological diary. When it became apparent to Rabbi Shapira that the end of the ghetto and all its inhabitants was near, he buried the book in a canister, subsequently retrieved after the end of the war from the archival records assembled by Emmanuel Ringelblum and the Oneg Shabbat Circle.³ The book was published in Israel in 1960 under the title *Esh Kodesh* (*Holy Fire*).

Shapira was the head of a Hasidic group in Warsaw, whose regular duties involved expounding on the weekly portion of the Torah. His first entry

¹ Wiesel, *And the Sea Is Never Full: Memoirs*, 70.

² Wiesel and Abrahamson, *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel*, 60.

³ Patterson, *Open Wounds: The Crisis of Jewish Thought in the Aftermath of Auschwitz*,

is dated September 14, 1939: Rosh Hashanah. He begins to delineate a theology evolving on the background of the tragic events being witnessed in the ghetto. He writes:

There is great need for us to arouse and excite our own fear of heaven during this period, because the fear itself is an acceptance of the yoke of God's sovereignty upon us. All the cries of the Jewish people heard in this period are a revelation of God's sovereignty and the acceptance of God's sovereignty upon us.⁴

The most important theme addressed in the work is the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva, who, at the moment of his death, affirmed the divine unity. Shapira writes:

We learn in the Talmud (Berachoth 61b), When they took R. Akiba out to kill him, it was time for recitation of the morning *Sh'ma*. They tore his flesh with iron combs, while he took upon himself the yoke of heaven. His student said to him, "Our rabbi, this far?" He replied, "All my days have I been at pain over the verses in Scripture (Deut 6:4–5) Love God your Lord with all your heart, all your soul, and all your might. "When will I ever have the opportunity to fulfill it?" I asked myself. And now that I have the opportunity, should I not fulfill it?" He was drawing out the word "One" and meditating upon it when his soul departed." With total self-abandonment, and through the elevation of his thoughts, he unified the name of God as he meditated upon the word "One."⁵

Indeed, the entire work may be viewed as a series of reflections on the word "One," as it appears in the *Sh'ma*. While Jewish piety demands the affirmation that everything is from God, that God is central and surrounds every event, Shapira, as a kabbalist and a Hasid, goes on to suggest that all is happening *to* God. In spite of the dark forces unleashed by the Nazi regime, there can be no acknowledgment of an independent evil or satanic power. There is only unity in God's universe, and hesed (loving kindness), encompasses all, even if it appears unbearable, unspeakable, and insufferable. Arguably, this has always been the difficulty of Israelite monotheism, which allows no shifting of responsibility or transference of blame from the Holy Blessed One, whose

⁴ Shapira, *Sacred Fire: Torah from the Years of Fury*, 6.

⁵ Shapira, xvi.

omnipotent will unites, controls and orchestrates all that transpires in a world declared to be “very good” (Gen 1:31).

Shapira’s material may in general be organized into four major themes. First, he considers the meaning of suffering, given that God is by nature *El Rachman*, “the God of mercies.” However, he goes on to ask how a merciful God can allow such things. Secondly, he takes up the concept of *Kiddush Hashem*, “the sanctification of the [divine] Name.” While in the Middle Ages it had been employed to describe the righteous act of taking one’s own life rather than submitting to forced conversion to Christianity, could the death of so many Jews now be seen as another kind of sanctification of God’s Name? Thirdly, he takes up themes of protest against God. He references Abraham, who in the book of Genesis pointedly questions God’s justice in destroying Sodom and Gomorrah: “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justly” (Gen 18:25). Fourthly, he takes up themes of encouragement. It is perfectly acceptable to be angry with God. It is also acceptable to question God’s justice. However, one must never give up hope. He writes:

Only God can spare us and save us with the speed of an eyeblink, only He can rebuild what has been destroyed, only He can heal us, at the time of the great Redemption and Resurrection. Please, God, have mercy, and save us without delay.⁶

Taken as a whole, Rabbi Shapira’s book lays out what may be called a “normative theology of suffering.” Most notably, he considers Abraham’s near sacrifice of his son Isaac, the *Akkedah*. Having bound his child of promise on an altar, Abraham took the sacrificial knife in hand, obeying the divine command. At the last minute, however, an angel stopped his hand. Could it be that Isaac represents an incomplete sacrifice, suspended in time, unfinished until the present? He writes:

And so the *Akeidah* was not only a test of Isaac, but also the commencement of a form of worship that requires total self-sacrifice for God and for Jewish people.

The *Akeidah* was a test of the desire and intention of Abraham and Isaac. It was never actually accomplished or completed because the angel said to

⁶ Polen, *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*, 35.

Abraham (Gen 22:12) “Do not harm the lad.” For this reason, the murder of a Jew by idolaters, which as an action devoid of worshipful intention is an absolute antithesis to the *Akeidah*. The *Akeidah* was just the beginning, the expression of intent and desire, while the murder of a Jew is the conclusion of the act. Thus, the *Akeidah* and all the murders of Jews since are components of one event.⁷

Perhaps the Jews of Poland represent Isaac in this day. Perhaps the current generation is that sacrifice. The question for Rabbi Shapira is whether this generation has the will, like Abraham, to fulfill the divine commandment.

Rabbi Shapira poses additional questions, asking if God is not bound by his own laws? Beyond traditional affirmations of Jewish theological constructs, he forges new, even radical ground, born from the suffering all around him. He suggests that if human beings have sinned, so has God:

At the end of Lamentations (5:21) we pray, “Return us to you, O God, and we will return.” How dare we ask of God that He return us? We sinned, we strayed, and He should bring us about? But note how the text says “... and we will return.” Let us, as it were, both return. We both need to repent, because if we humans have sinned, then the part of us that is God has also sinned ...⁸

Moreover, if the people are to repent of their transgressions during the High Holy Days, should not God repent also?:

It is a well-known teaching of the rabbis (Jerusalem Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* 7b; Exodus Rabbah, *Mishpatim* 30:9) that God observes all of the Commandments of the Torah. How then does He observe the commandment to repent, to do *t’shuvah*? God fulfills this commandment when He repents of the evil that he has rendered, God forbid, to His people Israel, or that He has decreed to befall them.⁹

Perhaps, as many have suggested throughout history, there is pedagogic value in suffering. Perhaps there is something to be learned in this new age. If, however, suffering is pedagogic, why do even the children suffer as well? What

⁷ Farbstein, *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives on Faith, Halachah and Leadership during the Holocaust*, Vol. 1, 469.

⁸ Shapira, *Sacred Fire*, xviii.

⁹ Shapira, xviv.

incomprehensible lessons are the most innocent expected to learn? Theological concepts may reverberate well, but where is the link between the world of theory and the world of actuality?

Rabbi Shapira frames these issues in reference to the Kabbalistic notion that God interacts with the material world via a series of ten divine “emanations,” each representing specific attributes of compassion and lovingkindness, balanced by severity. Nevertheless, he suggests that something is amiss with the entire divine plan. The emanations must not be penetrating into the world of today. There must be some obstacle, perhaps a permanent barrier that God has placed between the divine realm and our own.

In any case, Shapira declares that whatever anguish and suffering are now being experienced, one must never give in to hopelessness, which is ultimately the same as self-banishment. Moreover, despair is the same as abandoning oneself. He notes the Hebrew word that signifies one’s fundamental being or inclination – *yetzer*, spelled with 3 Hebrew letters: *yod* (corresponding to the English letter Y), *tsadi* (corresponding to the sound “ts”) and *resh* (corresponding to an R in English). If those letters are written out, with an arrow drawn through them from back to front, the result is another word: SH - D - Y (*Shaddai*), a mystical expression of the Divine Presence. In short, the mystical presence of God dwells within each and every Jew. Therefore, to give up on oneself is to give up on God. In the final analysis, Shapira is constrained to find comfort in the convulsions, and purpose in the pain. He holds forth the Talmudic notion of *Hevlei ha-Mashiakh* (“the pangs of the Messiah”) to encourage his people throughout whatever horrors are yet to come:

The Holy Blessed One is laboring to give birth through the Jewish people, and so the Jewish people suffer the birth pains, losing their strength as part of them dies, but this is how they give birth to the Light of the Messiah. And for us, it is the same as with a woman squatting on the birthing stool. We know that the strongest contractions indicate that the delivery is progressing, that with each contraction the child is born and revealed a little more. So also, when seeing a Jew suffering greatly with the birth pangs of the Messiah, we know that a greater part of the Light of the Messiah is being revealed through that person.¹⁰

Tragically, at age 55, Rabbi Shapira was taken to Majdanek, where he subsequently perished. Though his “light” was tragically extinguished, his

¹⁰ Shapira, xx.

testimony from the midst of the genocide is one of the most important to survive from the ashes of the Shoah.

The Happy Mother of Children

Another ultra-Orthodox rabbi, who was unfortunate enough to have lived in Budapest during the Nazi era, was the Hungarian scholar, teacher, and *chassid*, Yissachar Teichtal. At the beginning of the twentieth century, he became alarmed by the political agenda of many Hungarian Jews, who were caught up in Zionist movement. In 1936, Rabbi Teichtal joined one hundred fifty rabbinic and community leaders in voicing concerns to the parents of many of the Jewish youth, who in those days began leaving traditional religious life in order to join the “pioneers” (*Halutzim*) in Palestine. He publicly rebuked those attempting to create a Zionist infrastructure in the Holy Land. He published a letter in the *Yiddische Zeitung* newspaper (distributed in Munkacz) in support of the position of the chassidische rebbes, including R. Hayyim Elazar Shapira of Munkatch, that building up the Land of Israel threatened its sanctity: “Zionism is a desecration of holiness and a defilement of the supernal and Holy Land.”¹¹ The letter was included in the ultra-Orthodox *Tikkun Olam*, published in Munkatch and consisting of polemical anti-Zionist statements.¹²

Teichtal was serving as the rabbi of Pishtian, Slovakia when, in 1938, Hitler’s invasion brought about discriminatory, anti-Jewish laws. He began to develop what may be called a “counter-theology,” amounting to a complete reversal of what he had previously argued. He taught Torah and counseled his fellow Jews to remain steadfast in faith and do good deeds, now urging them to return to the Holy Land.

After working to organize relief efforts, Teichtal and his family hid in the attic of the local *Beit Midrash*, so as to avoid the deportations which began in the spring of 1942. He and his family thereafter returned to Hungary, where they wandered and found refuge in Budapest for two years. He vowed that if he should survive, he would write a treatise in honor of the Land of Israel, so as to inspire Jews to move there and rebuild it. He came to view this call to resettle in Palestine in terms of Divine Providence, and began to compile his own theological diary in Hebrew, called *Em ha-banim semechah* (“The Happy

¹¹ Lichtman, *Eim Habonim Semeichah: on Eretz Yisrael, Redemption, and Unity* xxviii.; see also Inbari, “Messianic Expectations in Hungarian Orthodox Theology before and during the Second World War,” 506–30.

¹² Teichthal, *Em Habanim Semeha: Restoration of Zion as a Response During the Holocaust*, xv.

Mother of Children”). Writing it virtually from memory, he completed it on the fifteenth of Cheshvan (December), 1943. In 1944, however, the Nazis invaded Hungary, and the Teichtals fled back to Czechoslovakia, hiding in Pressburg, before being discovered and deported to Auschwitz.

Throughout the work Teichtal remained devoted in tone to his religious tradition, attempting to harmonize his new understanding with that of his teachers and rebbes. He wrote:

I must confess the truth and declare my sin. I, too, despised the rebuilding of the Land, because I heard unqualified statements made by many Orthodox Jews, which became firmly implanted in my heart. I did not concern myself with this matter at all, because I was preoccupied with learning, teaching, and writing volumes on the Talmud and its commentaries, as well as responses to questions regarding the word of HaShem. I only delved into this *Halachah* after we suffered afflictions in this bitter exile. HaShem enlightened me, and I saw that I and all those who oppose this movement were mistaken. I admit and say, “That which I previously told you was mistaken,” just like Rava and other great Talmudic Sages did. [See Mesoret HaShas on Shabbat 63b.] When rabbis admit their mistakes, they are praiseworthy.¹³

Teichtal deliberately likened God to a mother waiting for her children to come home. The first chapter is called “The voice of my beloved is knocking” (*Kol Dodi Dofek*). His purpose was to explain why the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis, had come about at all. In his thinking, “Our Beloved” has been sending, as it were, “voice messages” across history, but the Jews have not listened. It is time, he argued, for the Jews to understand that history is the medium through which God speaks. Unfortunately, the Jewish people have made peace with their exile, and have not roused from their slumber. Teichtal’s overall purpose was to awaken his fellow Jews in order to rescue them from the denial and blindness that had once characterized his own viewpoint. He wrote: “My heart is awake, but I am asleep,” his argument being that the overall approach of Orthodox Jews toward redemption has been marked by passivity. Having convinced themselves to do nothing beyond waiting for the Messiah, the Jews have developed what can well be characterized as a “quietistic theology.”

¹³ Teichtal, *Eim Habanim Semeichah: On Eretz Yisrael, Redemption, and Unity*, 28.

In his view, the Jewish people have become convinced that exile has been a punishment from God. Their belief is that God and only God will bring the Jews back to the Land of Israel. Now, it is clear that this has been a fatal approach. By relying upon divine initiative alone, the Jews have essentially shoved their own redemptive efforts under the rug of history. God, however, has been waiting, as a mother waits for her children to come home. Teichtal came to believe that the Jews have mistakenly fallen in love with their adoptive nations, their “stepmothers,” having so thoroughly assimilated into their surrounding cultures that they have forgotten their nationhood. He goes on to address why many rabbis down through the ages never insisted that the Land of Israel be resettled. They ask why the greatest Jewish sage, Maimonides, never included settling in the Land of Israel in his list of 613 commandments of the Torah. Rabbi Teichtal answered that God’s reason was simply that settling the land was so essential that it did not need a separate commandment.

Almost shamefully, Teichtal reported that many of his fellow Orthodox Jews (*Haredim*) in Budapest and elsewhere, were out of touch with reality, living in their own “Garden of Eden.” Some Haredim, Teichtal noted, believed that they had been spared from all the trouble in Hungary because they had opposed Zionism. He wrote:

It is clear that he who prepares prior to the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath (*Avodah Zarah*, 3a), and since the Haredim did not toil, they have absolutely no influence in the Land (of Israel). Those who toil and build have the influence, and they are the masters of the Land. It is, therefore, no wonder that they are in control ... Now, what will the Haredim say? I do not know if they will ever be able to vindicate themselves before the heavenly court for not participating in the movement to rebuild the Land.¹⁴

Rabbi Teichtal was subject to harsh criticism for the arguments advanced in his book, and he was even banned from certain synagogues as a result. He nonetheless declared:

Thank God, I have no qualms about publicly expressing the truth that is in my heart. I am not afraid of any man, for I studied under great and righteous *gedolim* and was raised among the genuinely holy wise men of the generation. Thank God, I also studied Torah early on and was married young. At the age of nineteen, I was united with the daughter of the

¹⁴ Teichtal, 23.

foremost Torah scholar of the generation. Since then, Torah has never ceased from my table. I will not revoke my Torah opinion because of any *gadol* or *rebbe* or our generation, unless he debates the issues with me in the manner of Torah dialogue, using proofs from the words of *Chazal*. I will then concede to his words, if they are correct, but not if they are unfounded.¹⁵

In the final analysis, he issued a call for unity, arguing that it is only as a result of tension that dire situations can be remedied. It must be accepted, that it is through conflict within oneself and with others that redemption may come. In January 1945, as the Soviet army advanced through Poland, the inmates of Auschwitz, including the Teichtals, were transported deeper into Germany. Rabbi Teichtal was murdered in a train on his way to the Mauthausen concentration camp on the tenth of Shevat, 5705 (January 24, 1945). His son, Rabbi Chayim Menachem Teichtal, related what transpired:

After starving their victims for a number of days, the oppressors tossed each of them a meager crust of bread, with the evil intent of having them fight pathetically for their paltry allotment. Indeed, one of the Ukrainians grabbed the portion of a Jew – my father’s neighbor – who was desperate for this crust of bread. This angered my father, who demanded the return of the theft. The other travelers begged my father not to get involved, since it might cost him his life. But he said, “How can I stand by when the wronged man’s life depends on this food?” Indeed he insisted on taking a stand, and the Ukrainians, with the cooperation of the Nazi soldiers, rose against him and killed him, after torturing him mercilessly.¹⁶

If a merging of the approaches of the two rabbis might be identified, it may well involve the idea of *tikkun*, or “reconstruction.” Rabbi Shapira’s focus is on human beings and God, with no national aspects to his thinking. First, the Jewish individual must be rebuilt. While *Esh Kodesh* sets out to offer comfort and encouragement, Rabbi Teichtal’s approach is much more dramatic, in that it represents a clear summons to action. Teichtal rejects all exilic philosophies, insisting that this moment is perhaps the last chance for Jews to re-enter history, as it were. In that sense, it may well be understood as a “religious Zionist” philosophy.

¹⁵ Teichtal, 29.

¹⁶ Teichtal, xxiv.

It has been argued by some that the modern State of Israel was born in large part from the ashes of the Shoah, the tragedy of which spurred the international community to propose and support its formal creation. Others insist that, had the Shoah not taken place, the State of Israel would have been born anyway, earlier and even stronger, demographically and politically. In any case, it is fair to point out that it was almost exactly three years (only a relative instant in time) from the end of the Second World War and the Shoah until the modern Jewish nation came into being. In a certain metaphysical sense, the fervent cry of Rabbi Teichtal was indeed answered, and, in the larger view of human history, almost immediately.

The Trial of God

As to the ultimate question of whether there is room for God, philosophically, in a post-Shoah world, we would of course do well to note the deep theological struggles of Elie Wiesel, who, in 1977, wrote a play called "The Trial of God."¹⁷ It was set, not during the Shoah but during Purim in the year 1649. A later adaptation by BBC Television depicted a supposed trial of God by Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz. In it one of the prisoners delivers a poignant speech, relating their suffering, not to the Israelites, but to the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus:

God slew the first born of Egypt and led us out of Egypt. He struck down the firstborn, from the firstborn and heir of Pharaoh to the firstborn of the slave at the mill, He slew them all. Did He slay Pharaoh? It was Pharaoh who said no, but God let him live and slew his children instead. All the children. And then the people of Israel made their escape, taking with them all the gold and silver and jewelry and garments of the Egyptians, and then God drowned the soldiers who pursued them. He did not close the waters so that the soldiers could not follow; He waited until they were following, and then He closed the waters. Did the mothers of Egypt, did they think Adonai was just? Did God not make the Egyptians? Did God not make their rivers and make their crops grow? If not Him then who? Some other god? And what did He make them for? To punish them? To starve, to frighten, to slaughter them? The people of Amalek, the people of Egypt, what was it like for them when Adonai turned against them? They faced extinction at the hand of Adonai; they died for His purpose; they fell as we are falling;

¹⁷ Wiesel, *The Trial of God: (as it was held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod)*.

they were afraid as we are afraid. And what did they learn? They learned that Adonai, the Lord our God, our God is not good. He was not ever good; He was only on our side ...¹⁸

While there is no record of such a trial having taken place at Auschwitz, Wiesel insisted:

It happened at night; there were just three people. At the end of the trial, they used the word *chayav*, rather than “guilty.” It means “He owes us something.” Then we went to pray.¹⁹

In short, God may be omnipotent and all-powerful, but God has not been all-fair, all-righteous, all-just. We are, at the very least, owed an explanation. Still, from Wiesel’s perspective, one must respect divine providence, and in spite of everything, we pray.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- De Emmony, Andy, dir. *God on Trial*. (2008; United Kingdom: Hat Trick Productions, 2008), DVD.
- Farbstein, Esther, *Hidden in Thunder: Perspectives on Faith, Halachah and Leadership during the Holocaust, Vol. 1*; trans. Deborah Stern. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 2007.
- Frazer, Jenni. “Wiesel: Yes, We Really Did Put God on Trial,” *The JC*, Sep. 19, 2008: <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/wiesel-yes-we-really-did-put-god-on-trial-1.5056>
- Inbari, Motti. “Messianic Expectations in Hungarian Orthodox Theology before and during the Second World War,” *JQR* 107, 4 (2017): 506–30.
- Lichtman, Moshe. *Eim Habonim Semeichah: on Eretz Yisrael, Redemption, and Unity*. Mevaseret Tzion, Israel: Kol Mevaser Publications/Urjm, 2002.
- Patterson, David. *Open Wounds: The Crisis of Jewish Thought in the Aftermath of Auschwitz*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.
- Polen, Nehemia. *The Holy Fire: The Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto*. Lanham: Jason Aronson, 1999.
- Shapira, Kalonymos Kalmish. *Sacred Fire: Torah from the Years of Fury*, trans. J. Hershey Worch; ed. Deborah Miller. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002.

¹⁸ *God on Trial*, directed by Andy De Emmony (2008; United Kingdom: Hat Trick Productions, 2008), DVD.

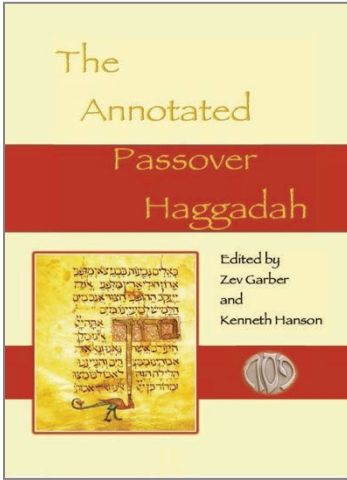
¹⁹ See Frazer, “Wiesel: Yes, We Really Did Put God on Trial.”

- Teichtal, Harav Yisachar Shlomo. *Eim Habanim Semeichah: On Eretz Yisrael, Redemption, and Unity*, trans. Moshe Lichtman. Mevaseret Tzion, Israel: Kol Mevaser Publications/Urim, 2000.
- . *Em Habanim Semeiha: Restoration of Zion as a Response During the Holocaust*, ed. Pesach Schindler. Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 1999.
- Wiesel, Elie. *And the Sea Is Never Full*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- . *The Trial of God: (as it was held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod)*. New York: Random House, 1979.
- Wiesel, Elie and Irving Abrahamson. *Against Silence: The Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel*. New York: Schocken Books, 1988.

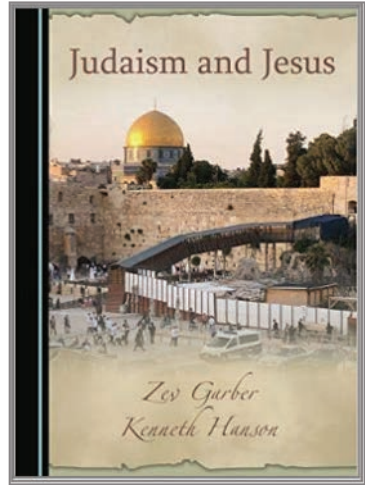
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

[Kenneth L. Hanson](#) is an associate professor and coordinator of the University of Central Florida Judaic Studies Program. He earned a Ph.D. in Hebrew Studies from the University of Texas at Austin, in 1991. His many scholarly articles focus on the Second Jewish Commonwealth, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the historical Jesus, and Jewish Christianity. He is co-author of *Judaism and Jesus* and has also published several books of popular scholarship, including: *Dead Sea Scrolls: The Untold Story*, *Kabbalah: Three Thousand Years of Mystic Tradition*, and *Secrets from the Lost Bible*. He has been interviewed multiple times on nationally syndicated radio, and his research was featured in the History Channel documentary, “Banned from the Bible.” He teaches a wide range of Judaic Studies courses, including the Hebrew language, the Hebrew Bible, Jewish history and culture, and the history of the Holocaust.

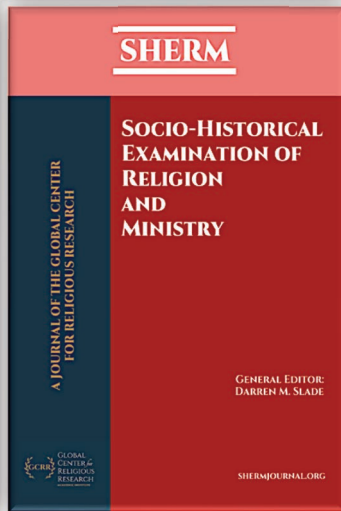
MORE FROM THE AUTHOR



*The Annotated
Passover Haggadah*
GCR Press, 2021



Judaism and Jesus
Cambridge Scholars, 2020



The World's Premier Research Institute
and Publishing House

JOIN THE **GARR ACADEMIC SOCIETY**

And be part of tens of thousands of scholars,
educators and students researching
religion from around the globe.

SIGNIFICANTLY
LOWER
MEMBERSHIP
COSTS



PRIORITY
PEER-REVIEW
AND
PUBLISHING



FREE DIGITAL
SUBSCRIPTION
TO **SHERM**
ACADEMIC
JOURNAL

PAID
"RESIDENT
SCHOLAR"
POSITIONS
AVAILABLE



GLOBAL
CENTER *for*
RELIGIOUS
RESEARCH
ACADEMIC INSTITUTE

WHERE RELIGIOUS STUDENTS,
SCHOLARS AND SPECIALISTS **FLOURISH**

GARR.ORG/JOINARR