Jewish liturgies and interreligious liturgies for the commemoration of the Holocaust in Israel and in the United States, from the 1940s to the present day

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Death and evil occur as experiences that cannot be fully fathomed by human reason. Death because it happens as an experience that is alien to life, whereas evil is unintelligible in the way it manifests itself. Only suffering (the suffering of mourning, absence and disappearance) appears like an experience that is rooted in life; like a trace of evil in the living, it marks those who survived the murderous swell of violence, and extends well beyond the generations who lived through the dark years of the war. Death and evil are the two central elements of the accounts left by this scar which the Holocaust has inflicted on the notion of civilisation. Unspeakable in their essence from one human to another, they leave us to conclude that these events cannot be comprehended through reason. No rational exploration is able to get anywhere near to fathoming death and evil, which can only really be approached through story telling or rites.

Stories and rites are the two constituent cornerstones of commemoration. Together, they lend substance to Jewish and Christian liturgies and their commemorative practices. The Jewish commemorative practice is decreed by the biblical imperative of Zakhor, “thou shalt remember”, as set out in the Book of Deuteronomy (25:17-19) during the time of the Exodus from Egypt. This imperative marks the identity of the Jewish people, beyond the boundary that separates the secular from the religious. Jewish people have a duty to remember and not to forget and to relive the commemorated events at every solemn occasion. Out of this imperative came the need, from 1942 forward, to organise the commemoration of the Jewish victims of the murderous frenzy of the Nazis. From the 1970s, these commemorations have progressively attracted Christians who are open to acknowledging the Jewish suffering. As a result, interreligious commemorations have emerged, especially in the United States, bringing together Jews and Christians around specific liturgies.

Our intent is to chart a common thread between the different liturgies, Jewish and interreligious, that have accompanied the commemoration of the Jewish gen-
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The first chapter will detail how Judaism went on to organise the commemorations of the massacres before the Holocaust, and those that were the first attempts at a religious commemoration of the Jewish genocide. The second chapter will focus on the genesis of Yom HaShoah or Holocaust Remembrance Day, and the public debate that surrounded it in Israel. The third chapter will dilate on the liturgical proposals which came with the religious commemorations of Yom HaShoah, and on the way in which these proposals distinguish themselves from the earlier commemorations. The last chapter will address the issue of the interreligious liturgies that commemorate the Holocaust.

GENESIS OF A COMMEMORATION: ON THE PRECEDENTS

Jewish history is marked by a number of catastrophes. The commemoration of these catastrophes was embedded in the liturgical calendar very early on. The first of these events in a chronological sense was the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE. From the destruction of the Second Temple forward, in 70 AD, the destruction of the two Temples in Jerusalem was commemorated under the name *Hurban HaBayit* on the same date in the Jewish calendar: Tisha b’Av, the ninth day of the month of Av. The day involves a 25-hour fast and the reading of the scroll of Lamentations. This commemoration served as a model and archetype for all destructions Judaism faced up until the Holocaust.

The destructions which European Judaism were subjected to from the time of the Crusades gave rise to new commemorations, albeit that from his time forward each event was given its own specific commemoration. These commemorations were referred to as *TaTNU* (1096) and *TaTKU* (1146) for the First and the Second Crusade, as *TaTKLA* (1171) for the martyrdom of the Jews of Blois, *TaH veTaT* (1648-1649) for the massacre perpetrated by Khmelnytsky and as *me’ora’ot TaRPaT* for the Arab riots and the massacre of Hebron in 1929. In their day, each of these commemorations added *piyutim* or liturgical poems to the service on Tisha b’Av.

The first commemoration for the victims of Nazism was in keeping with these past commemorations. From 13 December 1942, the Chief Rabbinate of Great Britain, under the direction of Joseph Hertz, decided to organise a par-
ticular service on the occasion of a “day of fasting, mourning and prayer for the victims of the mass killings in Nazi-occupied countries.” Very traditional in form, the service was organised around the notion that Israel had not forgotten its God. The section of the service that is more specifically devoted to prayers for the victims by invoking God the Redeemer and his Compassion. The congregation beseeched God not to forget Israel. The service ended by reciting the prayer “Avinu Malkeinu” (“Our Father, Our King!”), which is usually recited during the ten days of penitence that separate Rosh Hashanah from Yom Kippur, and the long version of the Kaddish (the Mourner’s Kaddish). As such, whilst recalling a time of peace, this exceptional religious service focused on mourning, the glorification of God and the redemption of Israel.

Behind each of the commemorations specified above is the implicit hypothesis of a God who turned his face away from Israel where the latter acts in sin. It is based on verses 31:16-17 of the Book of Deuteronomy:

And the Lord said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your ancestors, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. And in that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and calamities will come on them, and in that day they will ask, ‘Have not these disasters come on us because our God is not with us?”.

Because they believed in the assumption of a God who had turned his back on Israel that had become unfaithful, these commemorations invited the congregation to observe a day of fasting. The fast is traditionally an invitation to believers to open their hearts to repentance, to renege on the sins of the Ancestors as well as their own, and to get back on the right track, as it says in Book of Leviticus (26:40): “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors - their unfaithfulness and their hostility toward me.” All in order for God to shine his face back on Israel. The underlying aim of these commemorations was to restore Israel’s faith in its God, in order to put an end to the calamities.

This retributive logic is also seen in the day of commemoration of the victims of the Jewish genocide which was initiated by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel after the Second World War. Instigated by the traditional requirement for families to recite the Kaddish on the anniversary date of the death of a parent (known as the Jahrzeit), and in the face of the recurrent problem of establishing the date of these deaths for those who perished at the hands of the Nazis, in late 1948 the Chief Rabbinate of Israel proposed to make the day of 10 Tevet a “Yom Kaddish Klali”, a general Kaddish Day, intended for all the dead whose date of death is unknown.

The day of 10 Tevet is a fast day, which commemorates the start of a chain of events that culminated in the destruction of the Temple, on the 9th of the month.
of Av⁷. Although a date of minor importance in the Jewish liturgical calendar, this is exactly why it was chosen, over Tisha b’Av: of the four days of mourning which commemorate the destruction of the Temple, 10 Tevet recorded the lowest number of visits to the religious services being held. By making 10 Tevet into a general Kaddish day, the Rabbinate was hoping to lend added lustre to a solemn occasion which hitherto had been largely neglected by worshippers⁸.

The inclusion of the commemoration of the genocide by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in the existing liturgical calendar is testament to the Chief Rabbinate’s disinclination to introduce a halakhic⁹ innovation. It also shows the notion of continuity between the massacres of the past and the disaster of the Second World War, both from a historical and from a theological perspective. By latching the commemoration of the genocide onto the commemorations surrounding the Destruction of the Temple, the Chief Rabbinate made it clear there was no need to revise the traditional interpretations of the massacre and its causes.

**YOM HASHOAH (VEHAGEVOURAH)**

The first general Kaddish was held on 11 January 1949 and was broadly observed in the diaspora. Yet, the commemoration of 10 Tevet soon proved unsatisfactory to the majority of the Jewish people. The affirmation of a continuity between the old massacres and the Jewish genocide de the Second World War riled common sentiment, which regarded the genocide as an unprecedented event. The call to fast showed an outmoded theological anchoring, in that it insidiously linked the death of the victims to their unfaithfulness to the God of Israel. Finally, the uniquely religious character of the solemnity ignored a large section of the Jewish non-believers¹⁰.

Faced with rising disgruntlement triggered by the way in which the service of 10 Tevet was organised, public debate in Israel ensued from the early 1950s. As leading voices heard in this debate, the associations of survivors of the camps called for the State of Israel to put in place a “Holocaust Remembrance Day”¹¹. The veteran combatants of the ghettos had campaigned for Yom HaShoah veHa-Gevoura to be held on 15 Nissan, in order to mark the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (19 April 1943). The problem was that the uprising had broken out on the first night of Passover. The clergy therefore objected to this date, arguing that
the celebrations surrounding Passover should not be dimmed by the shadow of the genocide\(^\text{12}\). For this reason, the Knesset chose 27 Nissan as the date for Yom HaShoah, i.e. a week after the end of the Jewish Easter, and a week before Yom HaZikaron.

As such, Yom HaShoah was included in the list of the days of celebration created by the State of Israel. In the same way as for Yom HaZikaron (Remembrance Day which commemorates the victims of the Israeli wars, which was more recently expanded to include the civilian victims of terrorism), Yom HaAtzmaout (Independence Day) and Yom Yeroushalayim (which celebrates the reunification of Jerusalem which came into effect in 1967), whereas, strictly speaking, Yom HaShoah veHaGevourah is not a religious festival. However, the choice of its date by the Knesset takes the religious calendar\(^\text{13}\) into account.

The date put forward by the Knesset was chosen by a large proportion of the Jewish population in Israel and went on to become the milestone date for the commemoration of the Holocaust, first in the United States in the 1970s, and subsequently in the rest of the diaspora, under the name of “Holocaust Remembrance Day”.

Initially, Yom HaShoah (veHaGevoura), the remembrance day decreed by the Knesset in 1959, did not have a specific liturgy. Very laconically, the text of the 1959 law stated that “radio broadcasts should convey the specific character of the day and [that] in the entertainment venues, the programmes should relate only to topics that are in keeping with the spirit of the day\(^\text{14}\).” It was not until September 1961 that the Israeli government amended this law against the background of the Eichmann trial, requiring entertainment venues to close on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

**LENDING CONTENT TO THE COMMEMORATION**

After the solemnity of the day had been decreed, this left the content to be considered. In this respect, again we should stress the fact that Yom HaShoah soon attracted more initiatives from the religious world than the general Kaddish Day. As a moment that is detached from the traditional calendar, Yom HaShoah was conducive to the incorporation of liturgical innovations that were on a par with the events it was intended to commemorate.

There are numerous variations in form and content between the different liturgies adopted by the various Jewish communities across the world. Each community is free to incorporate the elements it sees fit in its service. To the wide majority of the communities, the religious commemoration confines itself to lighting six candles in memory of the six millions dead Jews, and to accompanying this gesture by offering a prayer, which in most cases is a Kaddish.

For the 1970s, the most elaborated liturgical proposal came from David Roskies\(^\text{15}\), and is called “Milei Laïla. Midrash al HaShoah”, with the sub-title “Night Words. A Midrash on the Holocaust.” Published in Washington in 1971, this booklet gathers...
texts that were both inspired by tradition (Torah, Talmud, Midrash) and by modern ideas (Nelly Sachs, Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, but equally Paul Eluard or Albert Camus, to name just a few authors). The texts (in Yiddish, English and Hebrew, of which several parts are sung) are arranged like a theatre play. They very strongly layer on the relevant biblical passages and the catastrophe of the genocide, as seen in the verse below, by way of an example:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,
Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them to make a yellow star upon their garments throughout their generations, one star over their heart and one on their back, of equal size and proportion: and it shall be for you a sign, that you may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them\textsuperscript{16}.

All the scenes converge towards the final recitation of the Kaddish, which is offered in its long version for the dead. As a prayer sanctifying God’s name, it express all the messianic hope of the people of Israel. Which is why it is sometimes followed by the recital of the Israeli hymn HaTikvah, meaning “Hope”, in some religious Zionist commemorations\textsuperscript{17}.

Embedded in the Jewish commemorative practices from at least the 1970s, Yom HaShoah has benefited from the progressive incorporation of a specific liturgy in the services of a more Reformist and Conservative (or Masorti) strand in the United States over the same time period. Two publications should be singled out in this regard\textsuperscript{18}. 

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In 1988, the Central Conference of American Rabbis supported the publication of *The Six Days of Destruction*, authored by Elie Wiesel and Albert H. Friedlander. The book was made up of six stories bookending the six days of Creation as set out in the Book of Genesis, at six days from Destruction, represented by six stories under the shadow of death. Each story ends with the same quote from the Book of Genesis: “Vayehi erev, vayehi voker...”, “there was night, there was day...”, whilst the sixth episode witness the furtive appearance of the figure of a *hassid*, who chants the Kaddish “from morning to night”\(^1\).

The first half of the book was intended for individual or collective reading, ideally with the family. It invited readers to listen to and meditate on the testimonials from the past. The second half of the book was dedicated to the liturgy. Conceived as a dialogue between the congregation and a designated reader, this liturgy allowed for a contextualisation and favoured moving away from a simple reading towards establishing the event in people’s memory. Like an echo of the commemorations from the past, the liturgy proposed in *The Six Days of Destruction* made it possible to bring out a private world of compassion. It consequently drew on the theology of the withdrawal of God, albeit devoid of its accusatory elements, and invited the congregation to proclaim their faith in the God of Compassion in spite of the suffering and destruction. The service concluded with the recitation of a modernised Kaddish, interspersed with the recital of the names of the camps (version disseminated in the same time period by the Rabbinical Assembly, and widely adopted across the world).

In 1989, one year after the publication of *Six Days of Destruction*, the Rabbinical Assembly (the international association of the *conservative* rabbis) published a *Siddur For Yom HaShoah*, a prayer book for Yom HaShoah, which in due course went on to be incorporated into the prayer book for solemn occasions, the *Siddur Sim Shalom*. Together, the followers of Reformed Judaism and American Masortim contributed to see Yom HaShoah embedded in the Jewish liturgical calendar, providing it with a set of gestures and signs aimed at making worshippers duly aware of the sheer magnitude of the catastrophe being commemorated.

One final step was taken in 2003, when the Rabbinical Assembly published a particular “Holocaust scroll” (Megillat HaShoah), which in doing so added to the traditional scrolls of Ecclesiastes, Esther, Song of Songs, Ruth and of Lamentations, which are read during the three pilgrimage celebrations, Purim and Tisha b’Av. Demand for such a scroll had not stopped since the early 1970s\(^2\). The traditional prayers no longer seemed appropriate for a commemoration of the genocide. The Holocaust asserted itself with the full strength of its exceptional singularity; the discontinuity of the event, its unique character, required a modern and specific liturgical accompaniment.

As the joint project of several religious leaders in Canada, the United States and Israel, the Megillat HaShoah was made up of various written testimonials in a biblical
style, ending with the recital of several prayers, including a Kaddish and a Yizkor (a prayer for deceased parents) written specifically for Yom HaShoah. Without being overwhelmingly observed, the proposal for a Megillat HaShoah provided elements which could serve as a model for other commemorations.

Faced with the fast rising disgruntlement surrounding the general Kaddish Day, organising the commemoration of the ineffable tragedy through the adoption of a specific and original liturgy had become a matter of urgency. Confronted with the need to enshrine into living memory an event that defied the traditional theological interpretations, the clerics who sought to find new forms to commemorate a massacre the sheer scale of which was unprecedented in human history showed considerable like-mindedness in their theological and stylistic choices.

In the Jewish liturgical productions that accompany Yom Hashoah, the glorification of God’s name and the appeal to his Compassion seemed to be slightly receding compared with previous productions. There is no mention of fast, and the references to Israel’s unfaithfulness were absent or eliminated, as they had become incomprehensible to most people.

**INTERRELIGIOUS LITURGIES IN THE UNITED STATES**

The Jewish commemorations of the victims of the Holocaust quickly attracted the support of non-Jews, Catholics and Protestants in the United States. Adapted to the “Midrash on the Holocaust”, the first interreligious liturgy was held in New York, at the Presbyterian church of Glen Morris (Ozone Park), in the second half of the 1970s. Numerous commemorations subsequently took on the form of an interreligious service, of which the stated purpose was to move towards tikkun olam, repairing or healing the world, by greatly increasing reconciliation opportunities and events between Jews and Christians. These commemorations “provide Jews and Christians in the community an opportunity for Tikkun, to come together and engage in healing. Yom HaShoah is the time for non-partisan, interfaith, interreligious services to take place. This is the time for citizens in the community to unite in reflection, commemoration, cooperation, and bearing witness.”

First seen to emerge among a handful of Jewish and Christian congregations, the religious commemorations of the Holocaust were adopted by a rising number of churches and synagogues over the decade, thanks in particular to the role played by the National Institute on the Holocaust of Philadelphia (now called the Philadelphia Center on the Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights), a centre for interreligious resources which was established as part of the Department of Religion of Temple University by Franklin H. Littell, who served as the dean of the department at the time.

With the support from the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia, which had been tasked with developing ecumenism in the State of Pennsylvania, from 1978 forward the National Institute on the Holocaust disseminated a booklet devoted to
the liturgies that existed in several congregations in the northern part of the United States. Intended for the Protestant, Catholic and Jewish communities, this booklet put forward several interreligious models for commemoration. It was followed by an expanded edition called “Liturgies on the Holocaust” in 1996.

The interreligious liturgies devised over the course of the 1970s combine secular texts, chants and prayers derived from the Jewish tradition. Especially aimed at building the recollection of the Holocaust, these interreligious commemorations mainly reproduce the impressions of night and silence, which are strongly present in the work of Elie Wiesel. As such, the Kaddish, or indeed the Shema Israel, are recited alongside the reading of texts by Elie Wiesel, Nelly Sachs or Anne Frank, in order to keep alive the memory of the tragedy among the commemorators. Ideally preceded by a moment of study and prayer, these commemorations especially aspired to serve as a time of reparation for a mankind broken by the Holocaust.

This self-chosen aim of redeeming the world is especially explicit in the Judeo-Catholic commemoration service for the victims of the Holocaust, proposed by Eugen J. Fisher (responsible for Jewish-Catholic relations at the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1977 to 2007) and Leon Klenicki (who served as the head of delegation for Jewish-Catholic relations of the Anti-Defamation League from 1973 to 2001). Globally distributed under the title “From Desolation to Hope” 25, the liturgy proposed by the two men was used on the occasion of a “conciliation service” at the cathedral of the diocese of Albany in 1986; and for the pilgrimage of Cardinal Law from Boston to Auschwitz that same year.

During the service, the reparation effort takes on the form of a reconciliation between Jews and Christians at the service. The American Catholic episcopate – much more readily than in Europe – acknowledged that Christian anti-Judaism had had a responsibility for the installation of Nazi anti-Semitism, and that Christians had had a responsibility in its implementation. Speaking before the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Malone of Youngstown, the organisation’s president, recognised that:

Acknowledgement is due that all too many Catholics were in fact among the executioners of death-camps inmates. But equally to be acknowledged are the millions of Catholics and thousands of their clergy who were themselves victims of death-camps executioners. Part of the Christian tragedy is that untold numbers of Christians lost their lives attempting to shelter Jews. Part of the Christian tragedy, too, is that Christians were numbered both among the executioners and among the victims. At one and the same time, Christians were both oppressors and oppressed. Trying to piece together the meaning of our Christian-Jewish relationship in the wake of such contradictory realities is a complex and demanding task for Christians and Jews alike. What are we to do? We need to seek reconciliation with each other, patiently
and persistently, as sons and daughters of the one God. Reconciliation—our only adequate response\textsuperscript{26}.

Much more so than the search for a theological link between Jews and Christians, the Judeo-Christian dialogue, which was first and foremost designed to confer on the mode of interreligious co-operation in North America, put the signs of reconciliation above any theological positioning\textsuperscript{27}. As gathering grounds of communion of the American nation with the democratic values propounded by the United States, the interreligious commemorations allowed for old divisions to be repaired and for paving the way for joint future actions to be prepared\textsuperscript{28}.

**CONCLUSION**

We have traced the paths followed by the Jewish and Christian traditions to commemorate the Jewish victims of the Second World War. In doing so, we have shown that the first liturgy was organised in Europe, before being redesigned in Israel and developed in a particularly original way in the United States.

Because it is the first vehicle of recollection, liturgy is at the forefront of the concerns surrounding the commemoration of the Holocaust. It endeavours to place the worshipper within this dialogue which weaves itself between the living and the dead, between death and life. Tasked with recreating a world made up of silence and night within the space of a ceremony, this liturgy confronts participants with an event of which the horror cannot be expressed, nor its sense fathomed. To quote Rufus Cornelsen (Metropolitan Christian Council, Philadelphia, 1978):

> Every remembrance of Yom HaShoah, whether in the form of memorial service, lecture and discussion, artistic expression or private reflection, inevitably leads to the boundaries of our being. Prayer, poetic visions, prophetic words, inspired hymns and psalms all are efforts to address the unspeakable mystery that overwhelms us in this remembrance\textsuperscript{29}.

As part of these different attempts at creating a modern liturgical practice, the recital of individual histories invariably allows us to enter into the complexity of the phenomena of hate, solitude and extermination that have typified the Holocaust. Unlike the Jewish liturgies of the destruction that preceded it, the believer enters into the event through the singularity, to be reminded that the Holocaust meant the assassination of six million individuals, not the massacre of unknowns whose names have been relegation to obligation. Through the liturgy, the mystery of evil is not unravelled, but transformed. In doing so, and even though they fail to make sense of the Holocaust, these theological and stylistic choices come together to make the catastrophe of the past heard, and act to permanently embed it in a chain in which the recollection is passed down, which provides it with identity but also with a sense of reparation.
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(5) This verse should be read alongside the Book of Ezekiel 24:1-14: the passage underscores the parable of the importance of the fast in this process of repentance.

(6) It should be noted that every family is free to choose the day on which this Kaddish is recited.

(7) In conjunction with 2 Kings 25:1-3: “So in the ninth year of Zedekiah’s reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat.”

(8) It should be noted that the choice of 10 Tevet was not followed by the ultra-Orthodox fringe groups, who preferred to add reciting a piyyut to the reading of the Book of Lamentations practised on Tisha b’Av, modelled after the commemorations from before the Holocaust.


(10) Adding to these problems was the harsh criticism from someone like Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who denies all religious significance of History and who disputes the validity of the general Kaddish Day. “An event that possesses a religious meaning is an event that has been performed as God intended”, he contends. That said, the Holocaust does not represent a sacrifice from the Jewish people made out of loyalty to the Torah. Therefore, it cannot constitute grounds for a religious commemoration. See Yeshayahu Leibowitz, Les fêtes juives. Réflexions sur les solennités du judaïsme, Paris, Cerf, “Patrimoines judaïsme”, 2011, p. 77. The article from which this quote is derived was first published in 1983. Leibowitz’s criticisms did not attract support. However, they do shed light on the paradox of a religious commemoration, intended for the entire Jewish people, whereas the latter defines itself differently on a religious level since the emancipation which got under way in the late 19th century.


(12) Disregarding the fact that no religious commemorations of any kind that involved a fast were allowed to be held on the day of Pesach, as fasting is prohibited on the Sabbath and the day before the Sabbath.

(13) This is to be seen as the fruit of an essential compromise that lies at the foundations of the State of Israel which, without being theocratic or observing the prohibitions imposed by the halakha, adapts to the religious component of its population and their particular sensitivities. This explains why Israel’s Independence Day is moved when it falls on a Sabbath and why, because of its festivities, this may lead to the deconsecration of the seventh day.

(14) Quoted in Hannah Jablonka, “Les rescapés de la Shoah et les Israéliens. Immigration et culture nouvelle (1945-1969)”, Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah, no. 182, January/June 2005, p. 253. At most, it was decided that a siren (conjuring up the sound of the Shofar to the most religious of believers) was to be sounded for two minutes at 10:00 am on the morning of Yom HaShoah, with everybody ceasing whatever they were doing for this length of time.

(15) A student at the Department of Jewish and Near-East Studies at Brandeis University at the time and the co-founder of the Yiddish six-monthly journal Yungtruf, He was awarded the Abram L. Sachar Prize in 1971 for Night Words. A Midrash on the Holocaust: The Prize was awarded given in recognition of his creative interpretation of Jewish life and the Jewish experience.

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(17) The Megillat HaShoah, mentioned below, is a good example. From a religious Zionist perspective, the creation of the State of Israel is viewed as a sign the world is moving towards the messianic age.


(19) There are many references to the work of Elie Wiesel. Silence is omnipresent (the silence of death, but equally the silence between the words, which according to Wiesel, was the only thing that lent meaning to the words). The night that envelops all of mankind is an obvious reference to Wiesel’s first novel, published as Night, and describing his time in the Nazi extermination camps.

(20) It should be noted that Rabbi Joseph B. Glaser, Vice-President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in his preface to The Six Days of Destruction refused to assimilate the publication by Elie Wiesel and Albert H. Friedlander on a “sixth scroll”. Loyal to the tradition of Reform Judaism, he did not want to exclude Christians from the commemorations, giving the work an exclusively Jewish spin. However, it is very much the equivalent of a sixth scroll that was presented here.


(23) It should be noted that the development of the commemorations continued apace over the course of the following decade in the United States. In the wake of the rising interest of American citizens in the anti-Jewish persecutions of the Second World War, the Yom HaShoah commemorations met with the support from President Carter, who ordered a President’s Commission on the Holocaust to be set up in 1978, followed by the establishment of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council in 1980. Embedded in the American civil calendar, Yom HaShoah has been included under the header of the Days of Remembrance since 1980 in the calendar of the national commemorations.


(27) Even if a Christian reading of the event exists, because of the proximity in time of Yom HaShoah to the Christian celebration of Easter. This Christian reading is close to the Passion of the Christ which deals with the suffering endured by the Jews in Europe during the Second World War, by calling in a Christianised understanding of the tsimtsum or the “Contraction of God”, in the way this appeared in the reading of the Episcopalian Reverend Richard L. Ullman (Church of the Redeemer, Springfield, around 1978): “Good Friday is, first of all, about the diminishment of the image of God in the world. On the sheerly human level, without an ounce of interpretation about the meaning of the ministry of Jesus, to crucify him was to diminish the image of God in the world […] So much so that now, these nineteen and a half centuries from the crucifixion, when Christians look at the cross on Good Friday, we see there the diminishment of the living image of God in the world […] So much so that now, these nineteen and a half centuries from the crucifixion, when Christians look at the cross on Good Friday we must see now not only Jesus there, but the children of that labor camp, and of that Lithuanian ghetto, and all the other six million Jews of the Holocaust, and the hundreds of thousands more Jews murdered by those who called themselves Christians from the time of the Emperor Constantine through the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition down to anti-Semites of this very hour.” (On the Holocaust, Liturgies, vol. 1, op. cit., p. 91 and 93). This Christian reading of the tsimtsum had been sparked in 1942 by Simone Weil, who then lived in the United States. It may be that Richard L. Ullman sought to update the intuition of Simone Weil. See also our article: “Dans le clair-obscur de la Croix”. Regards catholiques sur la Shoah des années quarante à nos jours”, Revue d’Histoire de la Shoah, no. 192, January/June 2010, p. 25-45.


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