

A Righteous Judgment on a Righteous People: Rav Yitzhak Hutner's Implicit Theology of the Holocaust

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If one is not simply to throw up one's hand in defeat, despair, or resignation and claim that God's ways are unknowable, Orthodox Haredi thought regarding the Holocaust that, at the same time, is responsive to modern sensibilities must accomplish two apparently contradictory tasks.

First, inasmuch as it is Haredi thought, it must affirm that the Holocaust was God's righteous judgment on His people. But second, inasmuch as it is responsive to modern sensibilities, it cannot simply claim, as does much Haredi Holocaust theodicy, that this judgment was God's righteous judgment inflicted on a sinful people for its sins, whether the general sin of non-observance and religious laxity or ideologically motivated rebellions against the tradition: Haskalah, religious Reform, liberalism, secularism, socialism, Zionism—or what have you.¹ Rather, paradoxically, it must

¹ The literature on this subject is vast. See the recent anthology, *Wrestling with God: Jewish Theological Responses during and after the Holocaust*, edited by Steven Katz, Shlomo Biderman, and Gershon Greenberg, Oxford and New York, 2007, in particular Part I, "Ultra-Orthodox Responses during and following the War," with an Introduction by Greenberg, and the extremely comprehensive bibliography at the end of the part. Note especially the articles of Greenberg and Eliezer Schweid listed there. Also note the very searching and thorough article of Avinoam Ro-

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affirm that the people who underwent this righteous judgment was itself a righteous people. The Holocaust thus turns out to be God's righteous judgment on His righteous people. It is in this way, I believe, that one can understand, for example, Rav Ovadya Yosef's well known controversial remarks on the subject.² Rav Yosef argued that while the victims of the Holocaust were themselves sinless (that is, they were righteous), through their suffering they

senak, "Faith, Crisis, and Silence in Jewish Thought after the Holocaust and in the Teaching of Andre Neher," *Andre Neher and Jewish Thought in Post-Holocaust France*, ed. Yehoyada Amir (Jerusalem, 2005; Hebrew), pp. 153–192. Perhaps the two outstanding Haredi leaders who have argued that the Holocaust was God's righteous judgment inflicted on a sinful people for its ideologically motivated rebellions against the tradition, were Rav Joel (Yoilish) Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe, and Rav Eliezer Menachem Shach, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh, the former emphasizing the "sin" of Zionism, the latter the "sin" of Haskalah. There is already an extensive secondary literature on the Satmar Rebbe. See, for example, Norman Lamm, "The Ideology of the Neturei Karta: According to the Satmarer Version," *Tradition* 12:2 (1971): 38–53, [reprinted in *Seventy Faces*, Vol. 2 (Hoboken, 2002), pp. 183–197]; Alan Nadler, "Politics and Piety: The Case of the Satmar Rebbe," *Judaism* 31:2 (Spring, 1982): 135–152; Zvi Jonathan Kaplan, "Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, Zionism, and Hungarian Orthodoxy," *Modern Judaism* 24:2 (May, 2004): 165–178; and David Sorotzkin, "Building the Earthly and Destroying the Heavenly: The Satmar Rebbe and the Radical Orthodox School of Thought," *The Land of Israel in Twentieth Century Jewish Thought*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Jerusalem, 2004; Hebrew), pp. 133–167. Regarding the thought of Rav Schach, see the important and path breaking article of Benjamin Brown, "Ha-Rav Schach: Ha'aratzat ha-Ruah, Bikkoret Le'umit, ve-ha-Hakhra'ot ha-Politiyyot be-Medinat Yisrael," *Dat u-Le'umiyyut*, ed. Neri Horowitz (Tel-Aviv, 2002), pp. 278–342; and the brief but thoughtful remarks of Rav Shagar in the article cited in note 11. For an incisive analysis of the spectrum of Haredi theological responses to the Holocaust from a more sociological point of view, see Menachem Freidman, "'Al Meh Asah Ha-Shem Kakhah?": Hitmoddedut ha-Hareidim 'im ha-Shoah," *Ha-Shoah be-Historiyyah ha-Yehudit: Historiographiyyah, Toda'ah, ve-Parshanut*, ed. Dan Michman (Jerusalem, 2005), pp. 579–607.

² See Adam Baruch, "Interview with Rav Ovadya Yosef," *Ma'ariv, Musaf Shabbat*, (2, 8, 2000), p. 4.