

RESPONDING TO THE SHOAH
REL/JSP 337
Fall 2014
T/TH 5:00-6:20, Life Science 200
Zachary Braiterman

office: 509 HL
hours: Wed 11:00-12:00
or by appointment:
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Syllabus

This course examines the religious dimensions surrounding the Nazi Holocaust. We pay particular attention to how Jewish theologians have responded to the Holocaust and negotiate its impact on traditional Jewish texts and ideas. Selected biblical and rabbinic texts show how the authors of classical Jewish texts respond to catastrophic suffering. Theodicy (the justification of God) and antitheodicy (the refusal of religious thinkers to justify or accept the relation between God and suffering) will be integral to our analysis. We then compare these classical texts with the Holocaust writings of Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and others. Finally, we examine the theological response of Richard Rubenstein, Eliezer Berkovits, and Emil Fackenheim -- Jewish thinkers who reject traditional Jewish ideas surrounding God and theodicy in light of Auschwitz. In doing so, we will assess the options, strategies, and rhetoric by which contemporary religious thinkers respond to historical crisis and reinvent tradition in the process.

Course requirements

reading, attendance at lecture, participation in class discussions,
weekly 1 reading critiques of previous week (mandatory, but not for grade)
individually scheduled screening of the "Night and Fog" and "Shoah"
take-home midterm
take home final examination

Required texts (available at bookstore):

TANAKH (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) (at bookstore, but any translation will do)
Primo Levi Survival in Auschwitz
Elie Wiesel Night
Richard Rubenstein After Auschwitz
Art Spiegelman, Maus
Course Reader (#5234 available at Campus Copies @ Marshall Sq. Mall)

Materials on reserve at Library

2 movies: "Night and Fog" and "Shoah" NOTE: You have to form into screening-groups and see these movies on your own. We are going to discuss these films in early October. Note also that "Shoah" consists of 5 tapes and runs some 9 hours ("Night and Fog" in contrast is very short). Plan ahead and early! Do not wait until last minute.

Readings:

THE HOLOCAUST: HISTORY AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT:

8/26 first day of class; no assignment

WRITING THE HOLOCAUST

8/28 Historical considerations: selections from Raul Hilburg The Destruction of the European Jews in COURSE READER
9/2 Primo Levi Survival in Auschwitz p.9-86
9/4 Primo Levi Survival in Auschwitz p.87-173
9/9 Jean Amery At the Mind's Limit in COURSE READER
Selections from Primo Levi The Drowned and the Saved in COURSE READER
9/11 Elie Wiesel Night p.12-76
9/16 Elie Wiesel Night p.77-127
9/18 Selection from Perl Benisch To Vanquish the Dragon in COURSE READER
9/23 Discuss NIGHT AND FOG and SHOAH (no reading assignment)

9/25 NO CLASS: ROSH HASHANAH

9/30 Spiegelman, Maus
10/2 Spiegelman, Maus

** MIDTERM DUE **

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN TRADITIONAL JUDAISM2

10/7 The Bible: Deuteronomy 23-33; Jeremiah 1-3, 25-44, 52

10/9 NO CLASS: SUKKOT

10/14 The Bible: The Book of Job

10/16 NO CLASS: SHEMINI ATZERET

10/21 Talmud and Midrash selections in COURSE READER
10/23 Talmud and Midrash selections in COURSE READER
Braiterman, "Bible and Midrash" from (God) After Auschwitz in COURSE READER

POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH THEOLOGY

Radical Jewish Theology: Richard Rubenstein

10/28 After Auschwitz preface to 1st edition, chp. 1, 10, 12

10/30 After Auschwitz chp.8 , p.197-200, chp 16

Modern Orthodox Jewish Thought: Eliezer Berkovits

11/4 Faith after the Holocaust p.1, 3-6, 67-113

11/6 Faith after the Holocaust p.114-143;
selection from With God in Hell in COURSE READER

Dialectical Jewish Theology: Emil Fackenheim

11/11 God's Presence in History in COURSE READER

11/13 God's Presence in History in COURSE READER

11/18 Selection from To Mend the World in COURSE READER

11/20 Selection from The Jewish Bible and the Holocaust in COURSE READER

Challenging Post-Holocaust Thought

12/2 Braiterman, "Against Holocaust Sublime" in COURSE READER and Levitt,
in COURSE READER

12/4 TBA

FINAL-EXAM: DUE LAST DAY OF FINALS