

rench Revolution: "The
t is was before." After
a we must face a hith-
f human existence. We
s which we know now
can only save mankind
and a greater responsi-
by civilized man. The
h numerous races must
e whole earth can be-
bomb," and entire races
arism. Only the biblical
l as the creation of God
s created in the image of
catastrophe looming on
ion alienated from God
nd earth."

Richard Lowell Rubenstein

Richard Rubenstein was born into an assimilated Jewish family in New York City in 1924. After difficult teen years in which he suffered directly and physically from anti-Semitism—despite his not having a Bar Mitzvah because of his family's complete disinterest in Judaism—he flirted with the idea of becoming a Unitarian minister. Drawn back to Judaism, he enrolled in September 1942 as a rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College, the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary in Cincinnati, and spent three years there. During these years he also studied at the University of Cincinnati and in 1945–1946 he received a B.A. in philosophy from the university. After the end of the war, in the wake of the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, he returned to his rabbinical studies. However, he was unhappy at HUC and with the help of Abraham Joshua Heschel, who had made a similar move, and the well-known Orthodox rabbi Isaac Hutner, at whose yeshiva he had begun to study in New York City, he transferred in 1948 to the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. He was ordained at JTS in 1952. He then did graduate work at Harvard, worked as a Conservative rabbi in Brockton, Massachusetts, and served as the Hillel director at Wellesley College between 1958 and 1960. In 1960 he received his doctorate from Harvard for a thesis in which he applied Freudian analysis to rabbinic *aggadah* (the nonlegal sections of the traditional rabbinic texts).

After receiving his doctorate, and while serving as the Hillel director at the University of Pittsburgh, Rubenstein became involved in the incipient theological debate about the Holocaust and the so-called death-of-God movement among Christian theologians. In consequence, he published his own version of a Jewish death-of-God theology in his highly influential 1966 collection, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism*. This provocative work caused great offense in many Jewish establishment quarters and, in consequence, he was essentially "exiled" from the Jewish community.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Rubenstein continued to publish a series of important books: *The Religious Imagination* (1968); *Morality and Eros* (1970); *My Brother Paul* (1972); *Power Struggle: An Autobiographical Confession* (1974); and *The Cunning of History* (1975). In 1970, he moved to a full-time professorship in religion at Florida State University. In this new role he published his challenging study of modernity as an age of genocidal violence, *The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World* (1983). In 1977 he was honored as Distinguished Professor of the Year at Florida State University, the university's highest honor. In 1995, at age seventy-one, he became president of the University of Bridgeport, a position from which he retired on 31 December 1999. He has been awarded honorary doctorates by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (1987) and Grand Valley State University (1999).

SELECTIONS

The three selections from Rubenstein's work are all drawn from the first edition of *After Auschwitz*. The first of these explains the basic theological problem he was both wrestling with and seeking to overcome, namely, classical Christian anti-Semitism and the idea of Jewish guilt which, for the Christian, is connected most specifically and acutely to the accusation of deicide. Rubenstein was shocked by the employment of this traditional theology by a leading German Christian theologian as an explanation of the Holocaust, i.e., God is punishing Jews for the crime of deicide through the instrument of Hitler. The second selection attempts to explain why Rubenstein holds fast to the importance of Judaism and Jewish community while also attempting to redefine the notion of God, now as Nothingness, as a consequence of the death camps. The third excerpt makes the interesting argument that even though Judaism no longer carries its historic and normative ontological content, it still provides valuable and much-needed human meaning in a world otherwise devoid of meaning. In a world in which "God is dead," Judaism (and other religions) become all the more relevant as the source of human caring and solidarity.

Selected Bibliography

Books by Richard Rubenstein

After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism (Indianapolis, 1966; 2d ed., Baltimore, 1992).

The Religious Imagination: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Jewish Theology (Indianapolis, 1968).

My Brother Paul (New York, 1972).

Power Struggle: An Autobiographical Confession (New York, 1974).

The Age of Triage: Fear and Hope in an Overcrowded World (Boston, 1983).

Books and Articles about Richard Rubenstein

Katz, Steven T. "Richard Rubenstein, the God of History, and the Logic of Judaism," in Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (New York, 1983), pp. 174–204.

Hellig, Jocelyn. "Richard Rubenstein," in *Interpreters of Judaism in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Steven T. Katz (Washington, D.C., 1993), pp. 249–264.

Braiterman, Zachary. *(God) after Auschwitz* (Princeton, 1998).

THE DEAN AND THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

The more one studies the classical utterances of Christianity on Jews and Judaism, while at the same time reviewing the terrible history of the Nazi period, the more one is prompted to ask whether there is something in the logic of Christian theology, *when pushed to a metaphysical extreme*, which ends with the justification of, if not the incitement to, the murder of Jews. Though there is an infinitude of pain in the exploration of this question, neither the Christian nor the Jew can avoid it.

Given the question of the relationship between Christianity and the Holocaust, I considered myself very fortunate when, during the summer of 1961, while I was on a visit to West Germany, the *Bundespresseamt*, the Press and Information Office of the German Federal Republic, made it possible for me to visit and interview Dr. Heinrich Grüber, Dean of the Evangelical Church in Berlin, at his home in Berlin-Dahlem. It was my third visit to Germany in

thirteen months. The first was official, the second and unofficial. On this visit, the Press and Information Office was making it possible for me to visit something of the compound in West Germany.

Thousands of German Christians, including Dean Grüber, stood against Eichmann [at his trial] and offered relevant testimony. Dean Grüber made the trip to Jerusalem in 1957. He is a Protestant clergyman with a heroic record of opposition to Nazism on Christian grounds, and for Nazism's chief victim, the Jewish people, brought him to Dachau. His resistance was especially courageous in that it incurred the possibility of death for himself and children as well as for his church.

Since the war Dean Grüber has devoted himself to the work of healing and reconciliation. He has been instrumental in the rebuilding of the Grüber Haus in Berlin, a center of refuge for victims of the Holocaust, including included Germans who had converted to Christianity. Jews who, in spite of the Holocaust, had ruptured their lives, were welcomed in Berlin. With public and private support, a very spacious and attractive home was built for these people who were the concern of the Dean.

In addition to testifying to the Holocaust, Dean Grüber has been instrumental in the work of reconciliation between Israel on the political level and Christianity and Judaism. He made his suggestion, on his seminar, to his seminar friends and admirers, to plant one hundred thousand trees in his honor in Israel. He insisted instead that they build Israel. He is also a member of an organization devoted to reconciliation between the youth of Israel and Germany. He visited Israel three times.

The Dean is over seventy years old, healthy and a hearteningly noticeable immediately and spacious home, son of a farmer, and today where, of necessity,

he first edition of blem he was both anti-Semitism and specifically and the employment of an explanation of icide through the Rubenstein holds also attempting to f the death camps. Judaism no longer rides valuable and ning. In a world in e more relevant as

olis, 1966; 2d ed., dianapolis, 1968).

ogic of Judaism," in -204. ntieth Century, edited

E

on of the relationship bend the Holocaust, I consid- ortunate when, during the ile I was on a visit to West spresseant, the Press and Inf f the German Federal Re- ssible for me to visit and ch Grüber, Dean of the Evan- erlin, at his home in Berlin- r third visit to Germany in

thirteen months. The first two visits were private and unofficial. On this occasion the Press and Information Office was extremely helpful in making it possible for me to come to understand something of the complex reality that is present-day West Germany.

Thousands of Germans could have testified against Eichmann [at his trial in Jerusalem in 1961] and offered relevant testimony. Only one actually made the trip to Jerusalem to testify. Dean Grüber is a Protestant clergyman with a very long and heroic record of opposition to the Nazis on Christian grounds, and of friendship and succor for Nazism's chief victims. In the end, his courage brought him to Dachau and near-martyrdom. His resistance was especially meritorious because it incurred the possibility of great danger to his wife and children as well as to himself.

Since the war Dean Grüber has devoted himself to the work of healing and reconciliation. He has been instrumental in creating the Heinrich Grüber Haus in Berlin-Dahlem, an old-age residence for victims of the Nuremberg Laws. These included Germans who had married Jews, Jews who had converted to Christianity, and a few old Jews who, in spite of the fury which had disrupted their lives, wanted to end their days in Berlin. With public and government support, a very spacious and attractive home has been built for these people who were the very special concern of the Dean.

In addition to testifying at the Eichmann trial, Dean Grüber has been instrumental in fostering the work of reconciliation between Germany and Israel on the political level, and between German Christianity and Judaism at the religious level. At his suggestion, on his seventieth birthday his German friends and admirers contributed well over one hundred thousand marks for the planting of a forest in his honor in Israel. He rejected all gifts. He insisted instead that the money be given to build Israel. He is also active in a German-Israeli organization devoted to the exchange of visits between the youth of the two countries. He has visited Israel three times.

The Dean is over seventy, but there is a healthiness and a heartiness to his person which are noticeable immediately. He has a very attractive and spacious home, something very rare in Berlin today where, of necessity, apartment-house living

is all that most people can hope for. He met me at the door and brought me to his study, which was lined with books, a rather attractive oil copy of Rembrandt's *Flora*, and all sorts of relics and souvenirs of a long and distinguished career. In one corner, there was also a very impressive sculpture of the Dean's head.

After many sessions of interviewing Germans in all walks of life, I had learned to expect the interviewee to undergo a warm-up period before the initial reserve wore off. In the case of the Dean, this was unnecessary. There was an admirable bluntness and candor to his manner which revealed that the man means exactly what he says. This thoroughgoing honesty was present to the point of pain throughout the interview. It was not a quality the Nazis valued.

The most obvious point of departure for the conversation was the Eichmann trial. He explained that he went to Jerusalem with the greatest reluctance, and only after his name had come up so frequently that he felt he had no decent alternative. He also asserted that he went as a German, a member of the people who had perpetuated the injustice, and a member of the Christian church which had remained silent before it.

"Did testifying cause you any harm with your own people?" I asked.

He replied that it had not and went on to say that he did not really see much difference between himself and Eichmann, that he too was guilty, that, in fact, the guilt was to be shared by all peoples rather than by Eichmann alone.

"If there had only been a little more responsibility all around, things would have been different."

He complained bitterly of how the governments of practically every civilized country turned their backs on the Jews, making it impossible for them to leave. He spoke of his own efforts to secure immigration visas and complained of how seldom he succeeded.

I asked him about the Heinrich Grüber Haus. He explained that he had helped hundreds of people, many of whom were victims of the Nuremberg Laws, to leave Germany. In recent years some wanted to return. Originally he had founded his home for twenty people, most of whom were Christians who had lost Jewish relatives

during the persecutions. He felt that these people deserved a more comfortable life in their remaining years than most old people. It was also extremely difficult to place them successfully in the average German old-age home as many German old people were still bitterly anti-Semitic and would have objected. To meet these problems, he had built, with much public support, this very unique and very beautiful home.

Without being asked, the Dean informed me that he had never converted Jews and did not want to do so now. On the contrary, he wanted Christians to become better Christians and Jews to become better Jews. I quickly learned that the Dean had very decided ideas on what Jews ought to be and how they ought to behave.

Again continuing without being questioned on the matter, the Dean informed me that Germany's Jews today were in great danger. He said that once again Jews are influential in the banks, the press, and other areas of public interest. This surprised me, as I had been informed that there are only eight thousand employed or self-employed Jews in a nation of fifty million.

"The problem in Germany is that the Jews haven't learned anything from what happened to them," he informed me. "I always tell my Jewish friends that they shouldn't put a hindrance in the way of our fight against anti-Semitism."

In view of his long-established friendship for the Jewish people, I asked him to clarify his statement. He replied that many of the brothels and risqué nightclubs, for example, are now in Jewish hands, especially those in close proximity to the army camps.

"For hundreds of years, there has been a virulent tradition of anti-Semitism among the Germans. Hitler exploited that tradition for his own ends. It is very difficult for us to wipe it out. After the Eichmann trial, this is one of my tasks. I am involved in one or two meetings a week to help end anti-Semitism, but it is very difficult because of the Jews in prominent positions and those who are engaged only in seeking money no matter what they do."

In reply, I told the Dean of the feelings of many Israelis that one of the most wonderful things about Israel is that there Jews have the right to be anything they want without relating it to the Jewish problem. I put the problem to him

in terms of the freedom of every man to make his own life choices and to pay the price for his personal decisions.

"Look, I don't understand why you are so troubled about a pitifully small number of Jews in shady positions or being interested in making money rather than following edifying pursuits. It seems to me that every person pays a price for the kind of life he leads. Why should Germans be upset about the life decisions of these Jews unless they are unduly envious or neurotically involved in other people's lives? Must every Jew make himself so pale, so inconspicuous, even invisible, that he will give no offense? Is that the lesson Jews must learn from the death camps, that they must prove to the Germans their preeminent capacity for virtue? Wouldn't it seem a far better solution for all Jews left in Germany to leave and go where they could be anything they wished, without worrying about what the Germans thought or felt about them? After what has happened, why should any Jew remain and worry about attaining the approbation of the German people?"

The Dean was not prepared to let go. He was disturbed at the thought of the few remaining Jews leaving Germany. He felt that I was correct that Jews had as much right to be anything they pleased as the Germans, but he also felt that, after what had happened, they ought not to do these things, as it made the work of ending anti-Semitism so much harder. It was evident that in his mind there was an objective relationship between Jewish behavior and anti-Semitism.

Having asserted that the Jews had as much right to produce scoundrels or scalawags as any other people, the Dean quickly retracted. He spoke of the ancient covenant between God and Israel and how Israel as the chosen people of God was under a very special obligation to behave in a way which was spiritually consistent with Divine ordinance.

"I don't say this about Israel; God says this in the Bible and I believe it!" he insisted with considerable emotion.

The Dean was not the first German clergyman who had spoken to me in this vein concerning Israel. I had previously met a number of others in Berlin and Bonn. All insisted that there was a very special providential relationship between

Israel, what happened this had been true in that the *Heilsgeschichte*. Jewish people had every day. In fairness to out that this belief has majority of religious. The theological significance movement and the es Israel lay largely in the and the assertion that J made by men and cou the pastors the convic be said that the conv ened—that nowhere i of God's activity in hi the life and the destin each instance I very t thinking had as its i conviction that the N was somehow God's w the Jewish people to instance before meetir by an embarrassed wit

Countess Dr. von F of the Evangelical chu ment, a charming and l German religious pers cussed this issue. She l interpretation of Israel's a special Divine conce drew it in the face of n

"Theologically this speaking and in any ter cannot believe that G destroy the Jews," she

Her reluctance to theology to its hideous the Nazis the accompli speaking, most underst reluctance in the other spoke, though, because there is a distinct possi random sampling of the

The same openness Dean Grüber had show him was again manife question concerning G the six million, a que decisive for contempor

every man to make his
pay the price for his per-

stand why you are so
small number of Jews in
g interested in making
ving edifying pursuits. It
erson pays a price for the
'hy should Germans be
ions of these Jews unless
or neurotically involved
Must every Jew make
spicuous, even invisible,
ense? Is that the lesson
death camps, that they
mans their preeminent
ldn't it seem a far better
t in Germany to leave
ould be anything they
g about what the Ger-
ut them? After what has
y Jew remain and worry
obation of the German

pared to let go. He was
t of the few remaining
le felt that I was correct
ght to be anything they
ut he also felt that, after
ought not to do these
rk of ending anti-Semi-
was evident that in his
ive relationship between
Semitism.

the Jews had as much
rels or scalawags as any
quickly retracted. He
enant between God and
e chosen people of God
obligation to behave in a
consistent with Divine

t Israel; God says this in
!" he insisted with con-

first German clergyman
in this vein concerning
et a number of others in
sisted that there was a
l relationship between

Israel, what happened to it, and God's will, that this had been true in the time of the Bible and that the *Heilsgeschichte* [sacred history] of the Jewish people had continued to unfold to this very day. In fairness to them, it should be pointed out that this belief has been shared by the vast majority of religious Jews throughout history. The theological significance of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel lay largely in the rejection of *Heilsgeschichte* and the assertion that Jewish misfortune had been made by men and could be undone by men. For the pastors the conviction remained—it should be said that the conviction has been strengthened—that nowhere in the world were the fruits of God's activity in history more evident than in the life and the destiny of the Jewish people. In each instance I very quickly rejoined that such thinking had as its inescapable conclusion the conviction that the Nazi slaughter of the Jews was somehow God's will, that God really wanted the Jewish people to be exterminated. In every instance before meeting Dr. Grüber, I was met by an embarrassed withdrawal.

Countess Dr. von Rittberg, the representative of the Evangelical church to the Bonn government, a charming and learned lady, was one of the German religious personalities with whom I discussed this issue. She had offered the customary interpretation of Israel's destiny as being guided by a special Divine concern, but she partially withdrew it in the face of my objection.

"Theologically this may be true, but humanly speaking and in any terms that I can understand, I cannot believe that God wanted the Nazis to destroy the Jews," she said.

Her reluctance to follow the logic of her theology to its hideous conclusion, which made the Nazis the accomplices of God, was, humanly speaking, most understandable. I found a similar reluctance in the other clergymen with whom I spoke, though, because I was a rabbi and a guest, there is a distinct possibility that I did not get a random sampling of theological opinion.

The same openness and lack of guile which Dean Grüber had shown from the moment I met him was again manifest in his reaction to my question concerning God's role in the death of the six million, a question which I believe is decisive for contemporary Jewish theology.

"Was it God's will that Hitler destroyed the Jews?" I repeated. "Is this what you believe concerning the events through which we have lived?"

Dr. Grüber arose from his chair and rather dramatically removed a Bible from a bookcase, opened it, and read: "*Um deinetwillen werden wir getötet den ganzen Tag...* for Thy sake are we slaughtered every day" (Psalms 44:22).

"When God desires my death, I give it to him!" he continued. "When I started my work against the Nazis I knew that I would be killed or go to the concentration camp. Eichmann asked me, 'Why do you help these Jews? They will not thank you.' I had my family; there were my wife and three children. Yet I said, 'Your will be done even if You ask my death.' For some reason, it was part of God's plan that the Jews died. God demands our death daily. He is the Lord, He is the Master, all is in His keeping and ordering."

Listening to the Dean, I recalled Erich Fromm's descriptions of the authoritarian personality in *Escape from Freedom*.¹ All the clergymen had asserted the absolute character of God's Lordship over mankind and of mankind's obligation to submit unquestioningly to that Lordship, but none had carried the logic of this theology as far as the Dean did.

The Dean's disturbing consistency undoubtedly had its special virtues. No consideration of personal safety could deter the Dean from total obedience to his heavenly Master; this contrasted starkly with too many of his fellow countrymen who gave lip-service to a similar ideal but conveniently turned the other way in the crisis. Nevertheless, there was another side to this stance which was by no means as pleasant. Eichmann also had served his master with complete and utterly unquestioning fidelity. Even sixteen years after the close of hostilities, not only Eichmann, but apparently his defense counsel, seemed to feel that such servitude was self-justifying. Furthermore, in both the Dean and his demonic antagonist, the will of the master, in the one case God, in the other case Hitler, was unredeemed by a saving empiricism. Neither man preferred an inconsistency in logic to the consistency of accepting the

1. (New York, 1941).

gratuitous murder of six million. In neither individual was there even a trace of personal autonomy.

When Dr. Grüber put down his Bible, it seemed as if, once having started, he could not stop himself. He looked at recent events from a thoroughly biblical perspective. In the past, the Jews had been smitten by Nebuchadnezzar and other "rods of God's anger." Hitler was simply another such rod. The incongruity of Hitler as an instrument of God never seemed to occur to him. Of course, he granted that what Hitler had done was immoral and he insisted that Hitler's followers were now being punished by God.

"At different times," he said, "God uses different peoples as His whip against His own people, the Jews, but those whom He uses will be punished far worse than the people of the Lord. You see it today here in Berlin. We are now in the same situation as the Jews. My church is in the East sector. Last Sunday (13 August, the day of the border closing) I preached on Hosea 6:1 ('Come, and let us return unto the Lord: For He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten, and He will bind us up'). God has beaten us for our terrible sins; I told our people in East Berlin that they must not lose faith that He will reunify us."

I felt a chill at that instant. There was enormous irony in the Dean's assertion that the Germans had become like Jews. I was listening to a German clergyman interpret German defeat as the rabbis had interpreted the fall of Jerusalem almost two thousand years before. For the rabbis, Jerusalem fell because of the sins of the Jewish people. For Dean Grüber, Berlin had fallen because of the sins of the German people. When he sought words of consolation with which to mollify the wounding of his imprisoned church he turned to the very same verses from Hosea which had consoled countless generations of Israel.

He pursued the analogy between Germany and Israel: "I know that God is punishing us because we have been the whip against Israel. In 1938 we smashed the synagogues; in 1945 our churches were smashed by the bombs. From 1938 we sent the Jews out to be homeless; since 1945 fifteen million Germans have experienced homelessness."

The feeling of guilt was very apparent; so too was the fact that for him German suffering appeased and ameliorated this feeling. Everything he said reiterated his belief that God was ultimately responsible for the death of the Jews. It may have been a mystery to him, but it was nevertheless taken as unshakable fact.

The Dean has asserted that God had been instrumental in the Holocaust. He had not asserted the nature of the crime for which God was supposed to have smitten the Jews. During the Eichmann trial, Dr. Servatius, the defense counsel, had offered the suggestion that the death of the six million was part of a "higher purpose," and in recompense for an earlier and greater crime against God, thereby joining the modern trial in Jerusalem with one held twenty centuries before. Time was running short. I did not have the opportunity to question Dean Grüber concerning the nature of the enormous crime for which six million Jews perished. His thinking was so thoroughly drenched in New Testament and prophetic categories that there is little reason to think that he would have disagreed with Dr. Servatius. Stated with theological finesse it comes to pretty much the same thing as the vulgar thought that the Christ-killers got what was coming to them. . . .

It would seem that as long as there is Christianity, Jews will be the potential objects of a special and ultimately pernicious attention which can always explode in violence. Even were all the textbooks "corrected," there would still be the Gospels, and they are enough to assure the ever-present threat of a murderous hatred of Jews by Christians. Even when Christians assert that all men are guilty of the death of the Christ, they are asserting a guilt more hideous than any known in any other religion, the murder of the Lord of Heaven and Earth. On the Jewish side, we would say that not only are the Jews not guilty of this deicide, but that no man is guilty because it never happened. Here again there is an unbridgeable wall. The best that Christians can do for the Jews is to spread the guilt, while always reserving the possibility of throwing it back entirely upon the Jews. This is no solution for the Jews, for they must insist that this dimension of guilt exists for no man in reality, although they might be willing to admit that it exists for every man in fantasy.

I am convinced that the "death of God" theology as Christianity. Technically, it reflects the Christian tradition of Christ. As such, the term creates some very obvious theologians. Nevertheless, in my will, come to the conclusion that the theology is unavoidable. Theologians have brought into which has led a very potent for decades. Death-of-God contemporary expression. One way or another, applied philosophy, medieval century German philosophy, existentialism of Martin

No man can really say: can we know that? Never say that we live in the time. This is more a statement than about God. The death of Buber felt this. He spoke can understand his reluctance to explicitly Christian terminology. He utilizes it because of my which Nietzsche's madman come upon us. There is Had I lived in another might have found some of my meanings. I am, however, a nihilist after Nietzsche and say we live in the time in which that the thread uniting the earth, has been broken. The unfeeling cosmos, the omnipotent power beyond our own will, what else can a Jew

When Professor William Hamilton, in my theological writing movement in his article *Christian Scholar*,¹ I was

1. William Hamilton, "The Christian Scholar" 48 (Spring 1968).