

Jewish Identity after the Holocaust

Excerpt from interview with Professor Yehuda Bauer

Director of the International Center for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem

January 18, 1998, Yad Vashem Jerusalem

Interviewer: Amos Goldberg

Q- What about Jewish identity – how was it influenced by the Holocaust?

B- As far as Jewish identity is concerned, this is very complicated. Jews do not agree with each other about what their identity actually is – whether it is religious or ethnic, or ethnic-religious, to what proportions, what religion means to them, and so on. There is a great difference of opinion within the Jewish community, because there is no common interpretation of self.

The Holocaust has had a tremendous impact on this, but the impact varies in different parts of the Jewish community. For some people, it is a call to return to Orthodox religious observance. For others, it is a call to integrate into the non-Jewish world to avoid such things from happening in the future. And for yet others, it is a combination of insisting on particularity and extending a hand outside to the general concern of humanity to oppose mass murder and genocide. For some, it is a political tool to achieve political ends. I think using the Holocaust as a political tool is an abomination, and it must never be done.

For all of them, I think, it is something that concerns their very core as Jews. The Holocaust affects all those who were born either before, or during, the event (and their number, of course, is diminishing), and all the rest who were born afterwards. The post-Holocaust birth of a Jew, whether he or she is conscious of it or not, is a statement against Nazism. The Nazis wanted to destroy the Jewish people, but Jews exist. Their very existence is a statement of a fight against Nazism, and a victory, if you like, over Nazism. Therefore, all these things impact on how Jews see themselves.

Source: The Multimedia CD 'Eclipse Of Humanity', Yad Vashem, Jerusalem
2000.