

Introduction

Because, friend, these are not just the bones
of murdered Jews lying in this grave.
The conscience of humankind
lies buried here as well.

Julian Tuwim¹

“What lies behind the timeless persistence of a tragedy from more than sixty years ago, an apparition which, like a recurring dream, haunts ever-new audiences though the actors long ago vacated the theater? ...How can it be that more than half a century has not healed the wounds? No one can answer the question alone. ...The sociologist must look to the psychologist, the anthropologist to the philosopher, the scholar of literature to the historian. And vice versa.”²

That is how the cultural anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir put the problem, and in so doing described our reason for publishing this book. It is a collection of essays touching on some of the most confounding questions of Holocaust research, edited and published by the Centre for Holocaust Studies of the Jagiellonian University and by the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum.

Answers to these questions are needed and sought, but in this book the intention is to portray the *pursuit* of answers, the struggle to come to terms with humanity’s most appalling experience.

The invited contributors are a diverse international group, each one representing a significant dimension of engagement with the problem of the Holocaust. Among them are distinguished professors, researchers and

1 Julian Tuwim, *My Żydzi polscy....We Polish Jews...*, Isaac Komem, trans. (Warsaw: Fundacja Shalom, 2008), 47.

2 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Historia jako fetysz,” in: *Rzeczy mgliste. Eseje i studia* (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2004), 97.

psychotherapists, and the heads and co-founders of important institutions. They are based in Canada, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Poland and the United States. Many of their writings are known as fundamental works.

The book presents the reflections of these scholars and public figures whose work involves the subject of the Holocaust. We asked them to write about difficulties they have faced, and we posed several questions to them: Do the analytical tools of the scholar, the researcher, the philosopher, the sociologist, the artist, prove weak or ineffective in dealing with the Holocaust? More than sixty years after the liberation of Auschwitz, are we intellectually and emotionally baffled by the genocide the Nazis committed there? If so, what are the paths taken to overcome this? How and why continue work on this most perplexing subject?

The essays are arranged from most general to most specific – only approximately, of course, as none of these papers are confined solely to reflections or to matters of practice. The five that form the first section directly confront the Holocaust as a phenomenon: the extent to which it can be understood, and the challenges it presents to research, to ethics, to Judaism and Christianity, to the Polish people and Europe, to our species.

The next and largest section takes us inside the work of these scholars and looks at how they do it, starting with papers broadly considering their approach to the task. Further on are essays describing problems encountered in the course of research – some of them methodological, some of them as tangible as organizational crises or court battles. Many of these writings have a very personal slant; this is what we hoped for from the outset of this project, and we thank those writers for their candor. Especially revealing are the descriptions of the context – academic, social, political, historical – in which the author has chosen and pursued his or her path. The last essays in this section grapple with particular topics in detail.

The last part is brief, but it serves as the coda to this book. If we have tried here to render the world of Holocaust research and writing, then these two contributions represent its two magnetic poles: Eleonora Bergman pragmatically explains why we must study the Holocaust despite – and because of – the puzzles it presents; then, speaking from the

experience of having plumbed the depths of that enormity, Elie Wiesel closes the book with a call from Auschwitz. He summons us to preserve hope – hope as the condition of our humanity.

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As this volume goes to press we mark the passing of Maria Orwid, a pioneer of the psychotherapy of children of the Holocaust and the second generation; teacher, humanitarian, child of the Holocaust.

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