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The Shoah and Christian Preaching

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Introduction: The *Shoah* and Christian Preaching

We remember it as the Holocaust; Jews remember it as *ha shoah*. The Hebraic understanding of “remember” is important, here. To “remember” is so to re-member or re-present something that it becomes present to the contemporary hearers. For Jews to re-member the Holocaust is to lament with unimaginable pain:

LORD, the pagans have invaded your heritage,
they have desecrated your holy Temple;
they have left the corpses of your servants
to the birds of the air for food,
and the flesh of your devout to the beasts of the earth.

They have shed blood like water
throughout Jerusalem, not a gravedigger left!
We are now insulted by our neighbours,
butt and laughing-stock of all those around us.
How much longer will you be angry, LORD? For ever?
Is your jealousy to go on smouldering like a fire?

For Christians to re-member the Holocaust is, above all, to
hear that lament:

Pour out your anger upon the pagans,
who do not acknowledge you,
and on those kingdoms
that do not call on your name,
for they have devoured Jacob
and reduced his home to desolation.

Why should the pagans ask, “Where is their LORD?”
May we soon see the pagans learning what vengeance
you exact for your servants’ blood shed here!
May the groans of the captive reach you;
by your mighty arm rescue those doomed to die! (Psalm 79)

In the winter term of 1997 at Lutheran Theological Seminary,
Saskatoon, Professor John W. Kleiner’s Jewish-Christian Relations

class planned and conducted a service in the LTS Chapel, "A Holocaust Commemoration", using an order of service from *Liturgies on the Holocaust*, ed. Marcia Sachs Littell (Lewiston and Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986). Two homilies were preached, one by Rabbi Roger Pavey and one by the Rev. Gordon Palmer. We are grateful to Dr. Kleiner for making these homilies available to *Consensus*.

To them we add two sermons, one a Good Friday meditation by the Editor, and the other an Easter narrative by Dr. Ilse Friesen. The Good Friday-Easter season has been for centuries the most terrifying time of the year for Jews. The remembrance of the Holocaust needs to become a necessary discipline for the Christian preacher during this central season of the Christian year.

Eduard R. Riegert
Homiletical Editor