

BookTalk

HOLOCAUSTISM VERSUS GOD

By Mayer Schiller

Why Should Jews Survive? Looking Past the Holocaust Toward a Jewish Future
By Michael Goldberg (Oxford University Press) 191 pages, \$23

Legend fails to record what happened to the brave lad in the well-known folk tale who observed out loud that the king had no clothes. This is probably just as well, for if we knew of his probably gruesome end there would be even fewer souls courageous enough to challenge the primary axioms of every age. In *Why Should Jews Survive?* Rabbi Michael Goldberg takes on two towering dogmas of our time—that the Holocaust represents the defining event of Jewish history, and that it provides the most compelling basis for Jewish survival. To Goldberg, the Holocaust is a “cult” with “its own tenets of faith, rites, and shrines.” It is also a “cult” that is unforgiving to those who question its basic tenets, so we must admire Goldberg’s courage. Yet, courage is not the only virtue God calls upon man to pursue. Fearlessness must ultimately be devoted to wisdom and faith. And by that standard, Goldberg’s critique, although telling at times, emerges as markedly flawed.

The central theme of the book is that American Jewry has replaced Judaism with a secular faith centered around the Holocaust and demanding of its adherents only one imperative: Jewish survival. Goldberg favorably quotes sociologist Jonathan Woocher’s characterization of the central precept of “civil Judaism” as “You shall love survival with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your might.” Goldberg readily grants that “civil Judaism’s leaders are well-

intentioned people,” but maintains that “they have lost track of what counts as Jewish survival. Historically, at least, to identify as a Jew meant serving a particular God in a particular way.” Those critical particulars, Goldberg maintains, “civil Judaism has discarded.”

According to Goldberg, one of the sub-dogmas of this survivalism is that the state of Israel has appropriated “the authority—and the allegiance—that once belonged to God.” His solution to these misunderstandings of what Judaism represents? “Repentance...changing one’s ways...turning back to God.”

Why has devotion to the Holocaust and Israel replaced the Jewish religion in the minds of most contemporary Jews? Ever since the Enlightenment, Jews and Christians alike have had to battle a jealous and arrogant secularism that soon controlled both the state and society’s mainstream means of communication. In the case of Jews this proved particularly difficult, for the Enlightenment threatened them not only with its intellectual dogmas, but also by removing the traditional social barriers that maintained Jews as a distinct people. Since World War II, the ranks of Jewry have been increasingly decimated by the twin forces of assimilation and loss of faith. Into this gap the Holocaust and Israel were inserted. Those factors allowed Jews to maintain a separate identity while demanding nothing of them in terms of belief and practice.

There were negative aspects to this new Jewish identity beyond its displacing of God. As Goldberg puts it, “The devotees of civil Judaism and its Holocaust cult share the conviction that, ultimately, Jews can count neither on God nor on other, non-Jewish, human beings to make...

WHY SHOULD JEWS SURVIVE?

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[themselves safe in]...a world that will never cease to be hostile to Jewish existence.... So, in the last analysis, there is a triune faith: There is no God, humanity is incorrigible, and the world is irredeemable.” This negative view of non-Jewish mankind is needed in order to convince Jews that they must, to their own way, devoted to survival at all costs.

Yet, the question must be raised: why try to survive as a people in the first place if the God of Abraham does not exist? As Goldberg is quick to point out, Jews who become Episcopalians are far safer than Jews who become Israelis. Does survival alone, relating to no power outside of itself, possess the force necessary to compel Jews to go on as Jews?

Unfortunately, while Goldberg is correct in noting that the Holocaust and Israel taken in isolation are rather meager fare, the vision of God that he would substitute for them is a sadly truncated one. He proposes that we replace the Holocaust “master story” with the “story” of the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Ten Commandments. Thus far we are on safe ground. We search in vain, though, to determine whether Goldberg feels that the “Exodus story” and the subsequent Revelation are to be viewed as historical events. Was the Torah actually given at Sinai? Did God literally speak? These are questions that Jews throughout their history have an-

swered in the affirmative. With Goldberg we are unsure whether the biblical text is to be seen as true or merely a useful myth. Indeed, when Goldberg ventures into a digression on the need to update Jewish law (particularly as it affects "women's issues") we find that he is willing to reject central elements of Jewish law wherever they run counter to the fashionable currents of the age. Talk of "master stories" will simply not do if they are merely handy tools.

Goldberg is quite clear that the Judaism he advocates is not based on the truth of Revelation and the binding authority of rabbinic law. After calling for a return to faith he gets down to specifics. "Somebody, no doubt, is wondering, 'What kind of Judaism would this be—Conservative, Reform, Orthodox, Reconstructionist?' It would be any of them if synagogues affiliated with these movements were willing to reorganize around a shared covenant."

But Reform Judaism denies God's authorship of the Bible. Conservative Judaism rejects the rabbinic law. Reconstructionists doubt the Lord's very existence. Holocaustism and these creeds share a crucial common feature. They do not worship the God of their fathers.

As far as his critique goes, Goldberg has much to offer. He is right that the story of Jewish suffering cut off from faith is a tragic one that ultimately has nothing to offer to future generations. Zionism without God is already running out of gas in the Middle East. A Jewishness based on virulent anti-gentilism casts a dark shadow over the Jewish heart and condemns its followers to an existence of hate and fear forever. As Goldberg notes, one of the central tenets of Holocaustism is that "you can't trust any of them—not the ones who fought with the Allies against the Nazis, not the ones who sheltered Jews from the Nazis, not even the ones not yet born." This is perhaps the most horrible sin of Holocaustism. It apes the sin of anti-Semitism by placing collective guilt upon all gentiles. Due to its demonization of all non-Jews it views with fear and loathing any gentile loyalty to their religions, nations, and races. Since all gentiles are forever potential Cossacks or Nazis, institutional Jewry seeks to defeat all gentile social enthusiasms that go beyond the realms of entertainment, economics, or secular

politics. We are called upon to deny the very group-based humanity of gentiles. Thus, Holocaustism uses the reality of Jewish persecution at specific times and places in history to advocate a Jewish political agenda for all time based upon the imperative to reduce gentile society to a civil, neutral, and secular compact.

The duplicity of this approach becomes obvious when the second half of Holocaustism—support for Israel—reveals its core teachings. Those teachings are anything but pluralist and neutral. They advocate a specifically Jewish state. Fair men should not begrudge this desire. But why should its advocates not grant the French or the English a similar right? Here the Holocaust returns. Gentiles must never be trusted to take their religious or racial identities seriously. And so we are thrust into a seemingly endless—and dishonest—conflict.

Rabbi Goldberg is to be commended for having opened this dilemma to public light. For his efforts he can expect little gratitude from those who determine Jewish public posture today. Yet his speculations must someday be pursued to a deeper level to do them justice and he must give the God of his own faith a more serious hearing.

Rabbi Schiller teaches Talmud at Yeshiva University High School for Boys in New York. He is the author of numerous books and articles.

THE PINSTRIPED PRIESTHOOD

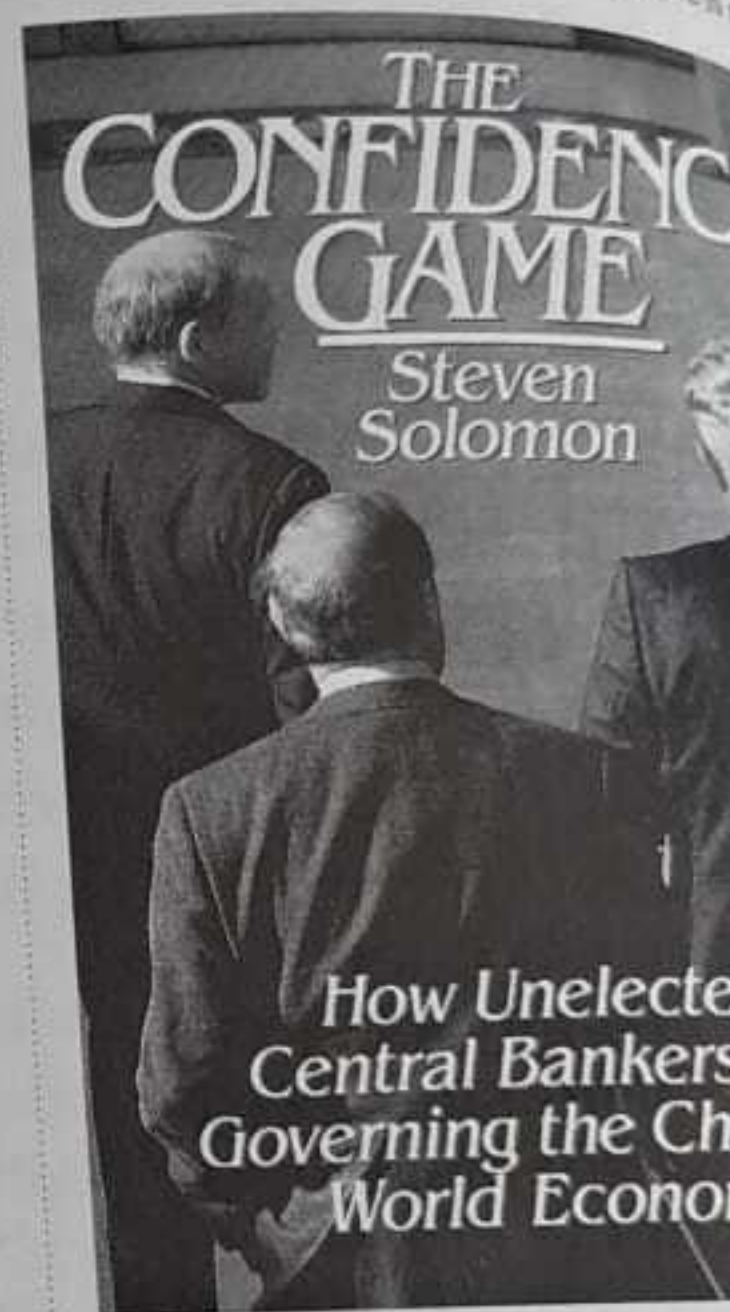
By John McClaughry

The Confidence Game: How Unelected Central Bankers Are Governing the Changed World Economy
By Steven Solomon (Simon & Schuster: New York) 512 pages, \$30

The lightning-fast movement of trillions of bits of financial data down global electronic pathways has overcome the regulatory capacity of the planet's political and financial statesmen. Liquid capital has leapt state boundaries. This silent new menace will surely wreak havoc on our secure financial world, says Steven Solomon, and it must be stopped.

Solomon happily finds one great warrior in pinstriped suits who usually in a hidden aerie in Basel, modestly eschewing fame and defeating the schemes of inept and less politicians, imposing ever more stringent controls on self-seeking businessmen, these are the world's Central Bankers dedicated to controlling the grave disease called "stateless capital."

Solomon, a former staff reporter for *Forbes*, chronicles this titanic clash in detail. He commits some factual whoppers (James Baker did not serve as secretary of Commerce; none of the political parties in 1912 advocated a central bank; there is



Woodrow Wilson Room in House). But *The Confidence Game* is nonetheless a sweeping achievement in contemporary history. We learn some interesting things from his research.

- When Fed chairman Paul Volcker (who is virtually deified in the United States) departed the 1979 IMF meeting before its conclusion, "panic spread in the financial markets. Gold shot up 100 ounces. Rumors circulated that Volcker had resigned or died." It would be interesting to learn that unscheduled meeting took place in the men's room of the Waldorf Astoria.
- The mission of the Bretton Woods system was to "inject and with-