

This thinksheet is a reflection on last night (3 June 74) with Elie Wiesel in the Cathedral of St. Jn.--part of a three-day Jewish/Christian confrontation on Holocaust.

1. Neither Christian speaker, Bp. Paul Moore or Dean James Morton, mentioned Jesus. In general in Jewish/Christian dialog in the USA [vs. Europe], Christians do not mention Jesus and in general play down Christian thinking and badmouth Christendom. Brighter Jews see through this inauthentic kenosis and ascesis, and resent the implicit patronism. The bp. go around to saying that in WWII he'd done some killing, and this added to the baleful atmosphere of Christian "penitence" vis-a-s rough treatment of Jews in dominantly Christian countries. Another element in inauthentic Jewish/Christian dialog, exhibited in the meeting: not the slightest Jewish penitence, not the slightest reference to any possible Jewish guilt or even imperfection--indeed, after pointing to the depths of potential evil in the human heart, EW said "I cannot hate," yet "I couldn't say 'I' representing a German soldier."
2. Many present to celebrate a literatus could have judged the moral-spiritual dimensions of the meeting had they never read a line of EW, that master seducer to sadness. He's the reverse of the standup Jewish comedian--you might say, the Jewish comedian when not on stage. A one-man wailing-wall complete with continuous wails, something nobody's better at than Jews. The U.S. Labor Party flier, distributed in the hall before the meeting, called the whole symposium "a maudlin and cynical celebration of death and horror"--a tough-tough judgment [and the representatives so disgraced themselves during and after the meeting that I'm canceling going to a meeting of theirs Saturday], but there is a certain hopelessness verging on cynicism [confessed by EW in the meeting], and EW's "Let We Forget" ad nauseam writing on the Holocaust can't entirely escape the adjective "maudlin," especially because it is unrelieved by humor or anything else. Indeed it is a kind of mental illness or at least mental imbalance: watching Eichmann's trial, he said "If he were sane, I should choose madness" [p.9, ONE GENERATION AFTER (Avon/72)]. The Holocaust "one generation after" is of course still sickening: may it never become otherwise! But there's a sick, sickening "innocent victim" moaning about the whole damn thing that is at a much lower level, spiritually and therapeutically, than Jeremiah.
3. No opportunity for questions (huge crowd, + NCLC potential disruption), but I'd have asked "Which is the better reponse to trouble, Jeremiah's intensified faith in and loyalty to God or Rabbi Richard Rubenstein's AFTER AUSCHWITZ [and, by implication, EW's] atheism?" I've debated Dick Rubenstein in public on this, and his single semieffective point was quantity: more Jews died under Hitler. But can he be sure of that? Or is it only that the furnace/gas deaths were more dramaturgic? And was the Judaism of the 20th c. AD more threatened with disappearance than the Judaism of the Captivity?....But it is extremely nettlesome for Christian thinkers to be honest in public with Jews [or, now, male Christian thinkers with women, and white Christian thinkers with blacks]: so much fear of being considered antisemitic [misogynist, nigger-hating]. But to withhold is patronizing, and patronism in the end pays too high costs in ignorance and arrogance and despite to the truth. [E.g., almost any "good American Christian" or Jew would read this thinksheet as antisemitic. Yet I am so prosemitic that I was the preacher, with the Israeli envoy to the USA, in a seven-synagogue memorial to the Munich massacre of the Israeli Olympic team. Yes, and I mentioned Jesus--six times.]
4. When one is pitching the same line for a long time without negative feedback, one's vision becomes increasingly distorted and his/her logic increasingly faulty. E.g., EW said there were no Christians in the death camps; i.e., he accused Peter Weiss [in his play] of implying there were no Jews [argumentum e silentio]; and EW did not mention any but Jews in the death camps; ergo,....In fact, in the whole EW speech Christianity came in for nothing but badmouthing. Loree forgives him: "He continues his passionate assignment " without complication or diversion. But there should be human limits to a pathos-appeal, and fraud and ungenerosity are among them.
5. EW as artist mixes Stoic nobility with godless morbidity (verging on ghoulishness), an an-sich marriage of Greek and Jew. Said he last evening, "The last word belongs to the victim, and it is up to the witness to shape it." Too bad so powerful a witness as EW can't give the Holocaust a more biblical shape.