

Institution: University of Gloucestershire
Unit of Assessment: UoA33 Theology and Religious Studies
Title of case study: Jewish Theology
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Professor Raphael's research into the theological meaning of women's experience during the Holocaust, the Jewishness of Jewish Art and idol-breaking as a key tool in the criticism of contemporary culture has had religious, cultural, political and educational impact outside the Higher Education academy. Her work has helped three constituencies to make theological or spiritual sense of the Holocaust, to understand the political connections between gender and genocide and to appreciate the theological relationship of modern Jewish art to the tradition. These constituencies are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. the general public; ii. Jews and Christians on ordination training courses where religious art and modern Jewish thought are studied; iii. Sixth-form pupils studying the problem of evil.
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The publications selected as having had impact on people without direct access to the theological academy are Raphael's book and related articles developing a feminist theology of the Holocaust and a later book and article developing a Jewish theology of art. Both of the cycles of research of which these were a part were begun and completed while she was in post at the University of Gloucestershire.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raphael's monograph <i>The Female Face of God in Auschwitz</i> (2003), shortlisted for the Koret Jewish Book Award in 2004 and with sales of almost 2,000 copies to date, was written in the conviction that reflection on Jewish women's experience can offer a more nuanced theological account of the holocaustal presence and absence of God than that of androcentric theology alone. The book and a number of related articles brought into conversation Jewish feminist theology, classic Jewish texts and historical and biographical accounts of women's experiences in the camps and ghettos. The purpose of the research was to enlarge the canon of authoritative Holocaust texts and question the dominant post-Holocaust assumption that God's absence or hiddenness during the catastrophe was a necessary deferral to human freedom. While post-Holocaust theology has tended to assume that human dignity is predicated on autonomy and that such can only be secured if God does not intervene in the causal processes of human choice, Raphael found that the memoir literature suggests that the survival of women's humanity (though rarely their physical survival) was invested not in the preservation of autonomy, but in the degree to which they were obligated to others. <p>The recurrent theme in women's Holocaust memoirs is how relations of love or care to the familial and quasi-familial suffering other could be maintained in circumstances designed to dehumanise and murder its victims. It was women's narration of the sustenance of a kind of covenantal love that seemed to Raphael to present a counter-narrative not only to that of androcentric, anti-redemptive Holocaust historiography, but to most post-Holocaust theology as well. If restorative human care (acts of <i>tikkun</i>) continued to make the world fit for God's presence as the Shekhinah or grieving divine mother, then the covenantal relationship between God and Israel was not broken or suspended by Auschwitz, but went on in spite of it. Raphael's arguments addressed a wide public interest in the lesser known experiences of women in the death and concentration camps, in spiritual resistance to dehumanization, and how one might be able to talk as a Jew, without a theology of the cross, about divine presence to suffering.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

2. Raphael's book *Judaism and the Visual Image: A Jewish Theology of Art* (Continuum, 2009) was inspired by recent Jewish cultural historian's findings that legal interpretations of the Second Commandment have been less restrictive than previously supposed. Rather than offer a history of Jewish art or an inventory of pictures with Jewish religious content, Raphael's study explored how modern Jewish art, figurative as well as abstract, arises in a positive and fruitful negotiation with the Second Commandment, not in spite or neglect of it.

3. References to the research

1. Feminist theology of the Holocaust

The Female Face of God in Auschwitz: A Jewish Feminist Theology of the Holocaust (London & New York: Routledge, 2003). Also published as an e-book. Excerpts translated into Polish, German and Dutch.

'The Price of (Masculine) Freedom and Becoming: A Feminist Response to Eliezer Berkovits's Post-Holocaust Free Will Defence of God's Non-Intervention in Auschwitz' in Pamela Sue Anderson and Beverley Clack (eds.) *Feminist Philosophy of Religion: Critical Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 136-150.

'From Women's History to Feminist Theology: Gender, Witness and Canonicity in the Religious Narration of the Holocaust' in Ursula King and Tina Beattie (eds.) *Gender, Religion and Diversity: New Perspectives* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), pp. 101-112.

'From Historiography to Theography: Reflections on the Role of Theological Aesthetics in *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*' in *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 15 (2011), 47-56. [In a special issue of the journal for the discussion of *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz*].

2. Jewish Theology of Art

Judaism and the Visual Image: A Jewish Theology of Art (Continuum: London and New York, 2009). Also published as an e-book.

'The Mystery of the Slashed Nose and the Empty Box: Towards a Theology of Jewish Art' *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 1 (2006), pp. 1-19.

4. Details of the impact: contribution and benefit

A. Religious impact

Raphael's post-Holocaust theological engagement has continued to reach a national and international audience through featuring in online blogs (see 5 A i-v) and broadcasts such as Radio 4's *Beyond Belief* in 2009 and Radio 4's prestigious *Lent Talks* that are given annually by a variety of 'household-name' figures, with several million listeners nationally and worldwide (8 and 11/4/09) (see 5 A vi-vii.)

The presentation of a theology of love in *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* led to Raphael's keynote lecture at the University of Oxford's interfaith symposium on Abrahamic theologies of love, co-hosted by HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of Jordan (13/10/12). The audience for the event (which was recorded for television) was over a hundred clergy and community leaders working to improve interfaith relations between the Abrahamic faiths in the UK and abroad.

B. Cultural impact

Raphael has enabled the public to re-examine their previous understanding of Jewish attitudes to

the visual dimension by introducing them to her and others' new thinking about Jewish art and its theology of images.

The centrepiece of her 2008 Sherman Lectures on Jewish Art (hosted by the University of Manchester and open to the public) was a lecture given to a non-academic audience covering the whole denominational spectrum of Manchester's Jewish community (see 5 B. i). In 2010 Raphael gave a lecture on Jewish art at Birmingham Progressive Synagogue's contribution to the 'European Days of Culture and Heritage' which led, soon afterwards, to her series of lectures on Jewish art for 'Mosaic' – a Birmingham-based Jewish Studies evening class for people without formal Jewish education. Professor Raphael's appointment as Oxford University's Walter Hussey Lecturer in the Church and the Arts in 2011-12, previously held by well-known artists such as the composer John Tavener, allowed her to challenge widespread misconceptions about Judaism as an iconophobic tradition and introduce people to its history of counter-idolatrous image-making. 2012 also saw her give paradigm-shifting lectures at an Oxford University Continuing Education Day School; a non credit-bearing Woolf Institute Interfaith Day School for clergy, NGOs and other non-academics. Raphael was invited in early 2013 to join a team of academic consultants for an architect-designed 'Tri-Faith Space' in Regent's Park, London, furthering the cause of interfaith relationships through a common space for worship.

Professor Raphael's capacity to make new research accessible and even entertaining has been evident in television and broadcasts to national audiences such as that given on [Stephen] Fry's *English Delight* (25/8/11) (see 5 B ii). Consequently, new thinking about religion and culture has been disseminated through talks to Gloucestershire societies such as The Cheltenham Interfaith Group and The Newman Society with audiences of about thirty to fifty people, many of whom are retired or are working outside the religious field.

C. Political impact

After the publication of her work on Holocaust theology, Raphael was appointed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2004 as the British Representative (academic) on the International Taskforce on Holocaust Remembrance, Education and Research, advising government ministers on the commemoration of genocidal atrocities and assessing bids for films and journalistic training on genocide-related topics. This governmental recognition of the authoritative role she has played in recent research on the dangerous intersection of sexual inequality and racism led to her being invited by The Imperial War Museum London to give a talk on sexual violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust in December 2010, as well as to broadcast on *Woman's Hour* (Radio 4, 26/4/12 and repeated on the weekend omnibus) and UCB Ireland's *Sky Digital News* on 28/4/12.

D. Educational impact

The publication of *Judaism and the Visual Image* in 2009 has influenced the content of ordination training (and thereby pulpit preaching) through day schools on Jewish art given for Jewish (Reform) and Christian (Ecumenical) ministerial ordinands such as in March, 2010 at the Queen's Foundation, Birmingham, and in February 2011, at the Leo Baeck College's programme for rabbinical training, London. Raphael's contribution to post-Holocaust theology is taught in rabbinical seminaries from Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires (but serving the whole Latin American region) to the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, and the Leo Baeck College in London.

The DVD *The Problem of Evil* (2005), which includes Raphael presenting a feminist theodicy of the Holocaust, remains a key resource for schools' A Level courses. On the strength of her name in this area, she was invited to write the BBC *Religion and Ethics Online Learning* article: 'Feminism and Judaism' (2012). These contributions help teachers to introduce feminist theological ideas not normally prominent in the curriculum to many cohorts of school pupils across the UK (see 5 D.i.).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A.i. In March 2010, on the Sojourners blog (Faith in Action for Social Justice) <http://sojo.net/blogs/2010/03/31/voice-day-melissa-raphael>, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* was cited as 'Voice of the Day'.
- ii. In his blog of June 2012, the Jewish performer and story-teller Amichai Lau-Lavie wrote about his study of *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* at a summer school at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York: 'On a gut level I am very interested in this discourse and attracted to Raphael's theological premise. I hope to pursue it in greater depth in the future.' (<http://amichai.me/the-presence-of-absence-another-theological-modelthinking-about-the-holocaust-4.html>).
- iii. As have other books by Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* has been recommended and shared by readers on the international website 'Goodreads'.
- iv. One review on Amazon <http://www.amazon.com/product-reviews/0415236657> reads: 'the best and most poignant (sic) book I have ever read. every Jew should own it, and everyone else too.'
- v. Raphael's *Female Face of God* is listed on Librarything.com, a website that recommends authors and books to the general public (<http://www.librarything.com/work/2393538>)
- vi. 'Your [*Lent Talk*] broadcast on Radio 4 ... reminded me of how indebted I am to you for the way I engage with the Christian Gospel. I know that in my preaching and pastoral work I have a slightly different 'take' to that of my colleagues (as well as being light years away from a lot of other Anglican clergy!), and much of that is due to your work.' (Email from Anglican minister, London, 11/04/09.)
- vii. "'Beyond Belief" has a weekly reach of 800,000 listeners. Melissa Raphael has been a first port of call on any issues dealing with Feminist Theology, women's religious experience and Jewish religious thought. As producer, I built an entire edition of Beyond Belief around her thinking, in a programme about Holocaust Theology. This and her contribution to Radio 4's prestigious Lent Talks in 2009 brought her academic work to public attention in a way that was affecting and relevant, and generated a substantial audience response.' (Email from BBC Radio 4 Producer, 25/9/13.)
- B.i. 'Professor Raphael's Sherman Lectures offered not only staff and students at the University, but also members of Manchester's Jewish community, something more than just a history of Jewish art. Raphael invited the community to consider new ways of thinking about Jewish image-making with lectures that were open to the public and that provoked lively debate about the contemporary relevance of the prohibition of idolatry.' [email, Professor, then of University of Manchester, 3.10.13]
- ii. 'I am so grateful to you [for *Radio 4 Fry's English Delight*]. I am involved with a church where, apart from one friend, discussion is conducted at a level where things are very small and literal. This is not how I believe and understand, but I've rather lost the words and concepts - and it's been doing my head in, as they say. Then I heard what you said this morning [...] and it sprang the lock and my mind has opened again, and things I understood have come back to me, and I can start to think properly again about these things..' [email, listener, London 25.8.10]
- D.i. 'Each year our Year 8 students consider possible responses to the question 'Why is there suffering?' and I have to say that very few are able to think that suffering, of any form, could have a positive effect on people's lives. As such the views you express put new and thought provoking ideas into their minds and provide plenty of discussion which allows me to stretch gifted and talented students and also challenge lower ability students to think 'outside the box'. (email from RE teacher, Cheltenham, 30.8.13.)