

Erzbischof Dr. Rowan Williams –
Sir Jonathan Sacks, Oberrabbiner der United Hebrew Congregations of
the Commonwealth

**Erzbischof Dr. Rowan Williams und Oberrabbiner Sir Jonathan
Sacks besuchen das ehemalige Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-
Birkenau**

Erzbischof Rowan Williams und Oberrabbiner Sir Jonathan Sacks besuchten gemeinsam das ehemalige Konzentrationslager Auschwitz-Birkenau. Williams stellt heraus, dass die Partikularität des Leidens immer wieder sich vor Augen geführt werden muss. Die Beschäftigung mit Einzelschicksalen hilft, in der Gegenwart sensibel zu sein für gesellschaftliche Zeichen der Hinwendung zum Bösen. Auschwitz-Birkenau ist nach Williams ein Ort der absoluten Profanität. Dennoch ist es wichtig auch hier Gott in den Gebeten der Opfer und ihrer zwischenmenschlichen Gesten zu suchen, die es auch hier gegeben hat. Neben dem Schweigen und der Erinnerung des Grauens soll auch davon erzählt werden. Sir Jonathan Sacks, Oberrabbiner für die israelitischen Gemeinden in Großbritannien berichtet von der großen Überwindung, die es ihn gekostet hat, an diesen Höllenort zu reisen. Der Wahnsinn der Judenvernichtung durch eine europäische, aufgeklärte, hochzivilisierte Nation wie Deutschland entsetzt ihn. Die Erinnerung des Grauens soll helfen, gegen Hass, Gewalt und Terror der Gegenwart zu kämpfen und Gottes Ebenbildlichkeit in den Menschen mit Respekt, Toleranz zu begegnen.

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Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams

The name has become so much a shorthand for the worst atrocities of our age that we can almost forget that it is a real place where real and particular people perished. As has often been said, the six million deaths of the Shoah mean one person's death repeated six million times: the statistics have to be returned to the realm of the specific, to names and faces.

The journey to Auschwitz that we are undertaking is part of the continuing effort not to lose sight of the specific. These things actually happened in a particular place to people with names and relationships and stories. Our faiths speak of God through telling the stories of specific people in actual places; it is in these particulars that we learn of God. But this means that we learn the horror of evil and godlessness also by hearing and telling particular stories. We are traveling to Auschwitz to hear and to learn this. And we are traveling so as to hear and to learn what we can say to each other of compassion and hope in the face of an evil that seems almost to defy human language.

Auschwitz, as many have said, reduces us to silence. But to say this and no more is to shy away from the challenge it poses. It is not enough to say that this evil is past

understanding or imagining: this is something that human beings did, and so we have to seek to understand and imagine. If we do not, how shall we be able to read the signs of the times, the indications that evil is gathering force once again and societies are slipping towards the same collective corruption and moral sickness that made the Shoah possible?

Distorted religion, fear of the stranger, the reduction of humans to functions and numbers, the obsession with technological solutions that take no account of human particularity – Auschwitz is more than the sum of these parts, but it would not have happened without them. They are still at work in our world. If we are truly committed to hearing and learning, we have no choice but to seek to grow in our ability to identify where these are present today and to go on telling the story of how they swelled the flood of inhumanity that overwhelmed a 'civilized' nation and continent.

This is a pilgrimage not to a holy place but to a place of utter profanity – a place where the name of God was profaned because the image of God in human beings was abused and disfigured. For many the name of God has become something that cannot be uttered or taken seriously because of what was done here. Yet our hope is that in making this journey together we also travel towards the God who binds us together in protest and grief at this profanation – and the God who even here was discerned in acts of solidarity and love, in voices raised in prayer even from the depth of suffering and in faces still marked by human warmth and care for fellow-sufferers. And if there were people who spoke and lived for God here, this too is something we and our world need to hear and to learn.

The Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

For years I could not bring myself to visit Auschwitz. There was an evil about it that, even at a distance, chilled my soul.

It was not just the sheer scale of the extermination: some one-and-a-half million innocent victims, ninety per cent of them Jews, but also Poles, Gypsies, and Russian prisoners of war, gassed, burned and turned to ash.

It was also the madness of it all, the lengths the Germans and their helpers went to search out every single Jew, to make sure not one would remain alive. At the height of the destruction, German troop trains were diverted from the Russian front to transport Jews to Auschwitz. The Nazis were prepared to put their own war effort at risk in order to kill Jews. This was, as one writer has put it, evil for evil's sake.

Yet this did not happen far away, in some distant time and in another kind of civilization. It happened in the heart of enlightened Europe in a country that prided itself on its art, its culture, its philosophy and ethics. More than half of the participants at the 1942 Wannsee Conference that decided on the 'Final Solution to the Jewish Question' –total extermination of all Jews – held the title 'Doctor'. String quartets played in Auschwitz-Birkenau as the factories of death consumed the victims.

However painful it is, we must learn what happened, that it may never happen again to anyone, whatever their colour, culture or creed. That is what the victims wanted of us: that we should never forget where hatred, left unchecked, can lead. We cannot

bring the dead back to life, but we can bring their memory back to life. We cannot change the past, but by remembering the past, we can change the future.

Hate has not vanished from our world, nor have war, violence and terror. That is why we must still remember, so that we, when the time comes, are willing to fight for tolerance, respect and human decency, honouring the image of God that lives in every human being however unlike us he or she is. Only thus can we rescue hope from the gates of hell.

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<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1026/auschwitz-birkenau.html> (2024-05).