



A Season for Healing

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The Holocaust divides history, for Auschwitz changed the way one must look at God and humankind. Roiphe argues that the Holocaust also has divided Jews from Christians, Poles, Russians, Arabs, blacks, even from the religion for which six million people died in Nazi concentration camps.

In some areas Roiphe's contention is persuasive. The State of Israel, the existence of which would have been impossible without the Holocaust, remains haunted by that disaster. Equating Yasir Arafat with Adolf Hitler and Arabs with Nazis, the nation's politicians cannot deal dispassionately with the Palestinian question. Constantly reminded of their silence during World War II, the Vatican and the Christian community in general cannot forgive the Jews for making them feel guilty. Nor can Jews forgive or forget that the non-Jewish world stood by as trains ran, ovens burned, and communities disappeared.

The book seems to go too far, though, in maintaining that all interfaith problems stem from the events of World War II. Between 1900 and 1905 there were 790 pogroms in Russia; the Soviet Union's hostility toward its Jewish population began centuries before 1945. Nor did Poles need Hitler to teach them anti-Semitism. The rift between American Jews and blacks did not originate in the killing fields of Europe but rather from shifting economic ground in the United States.

Yet whatever the origins of these divisions, Roiphe does well to point them out, for they reveal that nearly half a century after the horrors of World War II, communities remain xenophobic and ethnocentric. Unless people learn from the Holocaust just how dangerous such an outlook is, unless that event marks a true change in the way individuals see themselves and their world, this tragedy of the past will serve only as prologue to the still greater one of nuclear annihilation.

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