

Repentance for the Holocaust

Lessons from Jewish Thought for Confronting the German Past

C. K. MARTIN CHUNG

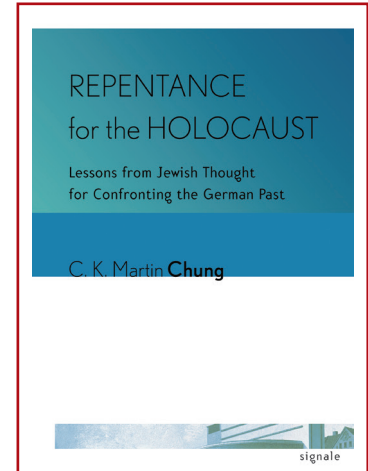
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In *Repentance for the Holocaust*, C. K. Martin Chung develops the biblical idea of “turning” (tshuvah) into a conceptual framework to analyze a particular area of contemporary German history, commonly referred to as Vergangenheitsbewältigung or “coming to terms with the past.” Chung examines a selection of German responses to the Nazi past, their interaction with the victims’ responses, such as those from Jewish individuals, and their correspondence with biblical repentance. In demonstrating the victims’ influence on German responses, Chung asserts that the phenomenon of Vergangenheitsbewältigung can best be understood in a relational, rather than a national, paradigm.

By establishing the conformity between those responses to past atrocities and the idea of “turning,” Chung argues that the religious texts from the Old Testament encapsulating this idea (especially the Psalms of Repentance) are viable intellectual resources for dialogues among victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and their descendants in the discussion of guilt and responsibility, justice and reparation, remembrance and reconciliation. It is a great irony that after Nazi Germany sought to eliminate each and every single Jew within its reach, postwar Germans have depended on the Jewish device of repentance as a feasible way out of their unparalleled national catastrophe and unprecedented spiritual ruin.

C. K. Martin Chung is Assistant Professor in the Department of Government and International Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University.



“C. K. Martin Chung considers the Jewish-German relationship after the Holocaust with a high level of ethical sensitivity and subtlety, an unwavering compassion, and a sense for the necessity of justice as well as mercy in dealing with this history. His approach calls to mind the orientation of G. E. Lessing or much more recently Emmanuel Levinas, both of whom stress, within widely divergent discourses, the priority of the ethical over the epistemological. Chung has written a history of post-Holocaust repentance that reveals what might become universally available guidelines for reconciliation processes in various global contexts.”—**Jeffrey S. Librett, University of Oregon, author of *Orientalism and the Figure of the Jew***

“With *Repentance for the Holocaust*, C. K. Martin Chung has accomplished a truly remarkable feat of scholarship and theological understanding, moving through biblical and rabbinic texts with ease and then addressing complex issues of modern Jewish thought as well as Christian theology. But what is extraordinary about the book is its overall argument. The idea that there are theological resources within Judaism, unique to Judaism, that have something important to say to Germans after the Holocaust is something I have never heard articulated by anyone, Jew or Christian. I am simply amazed by the audacity and brilliance. Chung’s book will spark wonderful discussions among scholars, and I can’t wait to participate in them.”—**Susannah Heschel, Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies, Dartmouth College, author of *The Aryan Jesus***

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