

Jewish Identity and Religiosity during the Holocaust

The panel will point out different Jewish approaches to persecution and life-threatening circumstances during the Holocaust. It will discuss how religiosity was shaped and practiced in the ghettos and concentration camps by the daily experience of witnessing atrocities and the importance of prayer during the Holocaust. Furthermore, it will be shown how Jews incorporated the Holocaust into their worldview and how they faced the issue of theodicy. Interpreting the different sources will provide insights if religious acts can be understood as acts of resistance. The panel aims to discuss how faith could fill voids caused by the dehumanization intended by the perpetrators.

The panel will focus and give interpretations of Jewish reactions during the Holocaust, which is less researched. The diverse reactions are interwoven with the victims' religiosity and Jewish identity. The presentations will cover a wide range of examples from different locations: the Warsaw Ghetto, a Gross-Rosen sub-camp, and one of the main extermination camps, Auschwitz-Birkenau. Furthermore, the speakers will talk as well about different points of view: the Rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, non-privileged concentration camp inmates, and the so-called 'Sonderkommando', a group of prisoners forced to work in the gas chambers and crematoria. The presentations aim for a deeper understanding of Jewish responses regarding the faith and identity of the victims to the atrocities of the perpetrators.