

“THE 614th COMMANDMENT”

Jewish philosopher Emil Fackenheim wrote many books but he is best known for a single phrase, a new commandment. Fackenheim taught that, in addition to the 613 commandments of tradition, Jews should observe a 614th -- not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory:

“We are commanded, first, to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted.”

Although some have criticized Fackenheim for offering a negative reason to be Jewish, Fackenheim did not intend it to be negative. Rather, he saw the education of each Jewish child as a victory over forgetting, and over darkness.

Service to the ideal of one God, realizing the promise of a triumph over despair, hatred, and indifference -- this is the 614th commandment the Jewish people at its best, seeks to teach the world.