

Holocaust – A History by Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt.

John Murray 2002. £25.00

It might be thought that nothing new or fresh could be written about the Holocaust, and it would be understandable if this attitude prompted people to reject this latest history; but such rejection would be a huge error, for this is a superb piece of work, painstakingly researched, full of its authors' integrity and academic quality, yet at the same time touchingly intimate in its use of personal testimony, much of it not previously recorded.

There are also maps, drawings and photographs, some of the latter badly damaged but restored to the point where they could be reproduced, and the image they present is made all the more poignant by the fact that it is not perfect.

Of especial note are the first three chapters which, apart from the drawing together of a multiplicity of different strands of events and attitudes that set the scene for the Holocaust, convincingly present the thesis that the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people, so often seen as the apotheosis of two millennia of institutionalised anti-semitism, was actually as much due to the concept of citizenship and the modern state as first expressed in the aftermath of the French revolution.

It is also notable that the scholarly mask slips occasionally, particularly when the authors speak of the silence of the German and Austrian peoples when the Nazi machine began the systematic persecution of their Jewish citizens. Their anger enhances their work, rather than diminishing it, and is carefully controlled.

This is a superb book which every Jewish home should have, and every Jew should read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh