

"THIS thing of darkness I acknowledge mine," says Prospero of Caliban in the closing scene of one of Shakespeare's greatest plays, *The Tempest*.

That concession did not come easily to Prospero — and nor, it seems, is it coming easily to those in Israel who have spawned their own "thing of darkness": Yigal Amir, the quietly spoken 25-year-old Bar-Ilan University student and graduate of the country's Yeshivot Hesder who cold-bloodedly gunned down the Israeli Prime Minister earlier this month.

But come it must, if Israel is to recover from the trauma it was cast into by the two deadly dum-dum bullets Amir pumped into Yitzhak Rabin's chest on November 4.

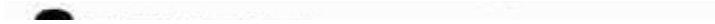
True, there has been a massive outpouring of public grief, from all sections of the Israeli community — including from those sections of the religious and secular right who opposed, and continue to oppose, the cause Mr Rabin died for.

And, as in the case of the Hebron mass-killer Baruch Goldstein last year, there has been much breast-beating and expression of horror that a religious, "Torah-true" Jew could do such a thing.

There has also been a call from all sections of the community, including the right, for tough measures against Jewish "extremists," and pious calls for an amelioration of the public debate by all parties.

But neither the right-wing religious establishment that educated Amir in the belief that there is a "higher authority" than Israel's democratically elected government, nor the broad right-wing political establishment that augmented this belief with a secular delegitimation of that government, has yet dis-

A thing of darkness



COMMENT

David Bernstein

played the moral courage to acknowledge him as their own.

Their first reaction, by and large, has been to distance themselves from him, as they did from Baruch Goldstein last year. They appear to believe Amir and his ilk can be isolated and delegitimised as an aberration, without any need to fundamentally reappraise their own contribution to the religious, ideological and political matrix in which his fanaticism played itself out.

They are being aided in this, for the moment at least, by the government's response to the tragedy. Understandably, the government is focusing its attention on the extremist groups Amir is believed to have been associated with, coupled with urgent legislative measures to outlaw the kind of inflammatory public invective many believe is responsible for creating the climate of hatred in which Amir operated.

These are undoubtedly necessary as an urgent first response to the crisis. But they are essentially first-aid measures, and do not even begin to go to the root cause of the problem. That is a far more difficult, long-term exercise that is going to tax Israel's political,

religious, legal and educational leadership for years to come.

There is, however, a major window of opportunity Israel can use to get to grips with the core issues involved, directly and immediately. That is the upcoming trial of Yitzhak Rabin's assassin.

Israel last had a similar opportunity 35 years ago, when Adolf Eichmann was spirited to Israel and put on public trial for crimes against humanity. Justice was done, and Eichmann was hanged. But of far greater and more lasting importance was the conceptual

Eichmann was hanged. But of far greater and more lasting importance was the opportunity that trial provided to publicly try, not just Eichmann, but the obscene ideology and political system that had produced him.

Clearly, Amir's crime, however horrendous, brooks no comparison with those of Eichmann. Nor can the ideology that drives the likes of Amir, noxious and detestable as it is, be properly compared with that which drove the likes of Eichman. But the issues involved are no less momentous and, if anything, more immediately urgent today than those raised at the Eichmann trial were in 1961.

It is highly unlikely, however, that Israel will choose to stage a high-profile, maximum-exposure Eichmann-style trial for Yigal Amir — out of legitimate concern not to further exacerbate the already overcharged political climate in the country.

But it is to be hoped that Amir's trial, whatever form it takes, will not flinch from going beyond the narrow, immediate circumstances of the murder and will closely examine the

broad religious, educational and political milieu that produced the murderer.

This would include the religious school system Amir attended, the Yeshivot Hesder in the framework of which he did his military service, the religious settlement movement with which he was closely associated — and even Bar Ilan University, Israel's premier religious-Zionist educational institution, where he was studying at the time he committed the murder.

It would include, too, Israel's rabbinical establishment, which has done little or nothing over many years to effectively curb the subversive educational and political activities of its more extreme fundamentalist elements, as well as the national religious and secular right-wing political establishments, which encouraged and tolerated the creation of a climate of political hatred and deligitimisaton that served as a context for Amir's horrendous crime.

dous crime.

None of these, of course, would be "on trial" in any formal sense. And nor should there be any attempt to delegitimise them or to hold them responsible, in a legal sense, for the criminal actions of one man.

But there is a real need to establish their role in creating the conditions that led to Yitzhak Rabin's murder, in a rational, dispassionate, apolitical, and non-confrontational forum.

Ultimately, what such a trial should do, apart from see that Amir is duly punished, is force those segments of Israeli society most responsible, unambiguously and unequivocally to acknowledge "this thing of darkness" as their own — and to make the necessary *cheshebon nefesh*, spiritual reckoning, and draw the appropriate conclusions.
