

# **BETRAYAL OF SPIRIT**

Also by Thomas A. Idinopulos

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# BETRAYAL OF SPIRIT

Jew-hatred, the Holocaust, and Christianity

Thomas A. Idinopulos

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## *Dedication*

To Lea

...horse tail of coal black hair,  
natural Buddhist,  
beloved daughter of India,  
sister clam,  
forever bear...



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This book is dedicated to Lea, my wife. The inscription says it all.

Thomas A. Idinopulos  
Cincinnati

## Foreword

*Betrayal of Spirit: Jew-hatred, the Holocaust, and Christianity* is a gem of theological and historical inquiry. The Greek Orthodox theologian Thomas A. Idinopulos offers a theological interpretation of the history of Jew-hatred in Christendom. The author insightfully reveals the interplay between rational and irrational, religious and racial components that combined to make the Holocaust a dreadful reality. But this study transcends intellectual issues. Like every theology that is authentic, the author combines personal experience and theological reflection. The book's prologue reports his early exposure as a youth to the venom of Jew-hatred. The unsettling and overpowering experience impelled him on a lifelong preoccupation; studying, teaching, and writing about the *Shoah*.

This thoughtful and provocative study raises crucial post-Auschwitz issues for Christian-Jewish relations and for the meaning of Christianity itself. While Mr. Idinopulos clearly favors respectful interfaith dialogue, he doubts that this can be built on a foundation of theologically reformulated Christianity. Christianity of course emerged from a Jewish matrix, but the Christian faith evolved into something new, something different from its original source. The theological ambiguity of Christianity can be traced to Paul who combined two teachings: upholding Pharisaic teachings about resurrection and incorporating them with the pagan notion of a dying/rising savior god in the form of Jesus as risen lord. Nevertheless, Idinopulos observes that while "there is no religious bridge connecting Judaism and Christianity, there are...a number of theological underpasses taking one to the neighbor's house."

*Betrayal of Spirit* asks the central question of God and belief following Auschwitz. The hideous wounding of Judaism and Jewish belief after the *Shoah* is beyond dispute, although Jewish theological responses to the disaster vary. Idinopulos insightfully discusses the range of these responses, from the ultra orthodox *Haredim* to the theologically sophisticated position of Arthur A. Cohen who, borrowing from the vocabulary of Rudolph Otto, termed the Holocaust a *Tremendum*. Moreover, the author makes a

theologically important, if existentially challenging, distinction between the unprecedented defeat of God at Auschwitz and the death of deity. God was defeated by the death camps; at least traditional assertions about divine sovereignty were called radically into question. But God did not die. The theological legacy of Auschwitz consists of questions, not only for Jews but for Christians as well.

Idinopulos, like the late Harry James Cargas who referred to himself as a post-Auschwitz Catholic, understands that the Holocaust is a monumental challenge to Christianity. In order to achieve integrity of faith, argues the author, it is essential that this faith refrain from repeating the teaching of contempt that is expressed in the traditional Christian theology of supercessionism. Instead, authentic response to Auschwitz requires humility before the enormity of the event. Citing Irving Greenberg's stunning assertion that "No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children," the author challenges Christianity's contention that Christ's sacrificial atonement on the cross has redeemed the world.

After the Holocaust, it is imperative that Christians focus more on deeds, rather than creeds. What makes one an authentic Christian, contends Idinopulos, is not attesting to the belief in the victory of Christ's cross which, in any event pits "true belief" against the counter evidence of history. Rather, the real post-Auschwitz challenge for the believing Christian is to affirm the meaning of Christ's leadership in the life of an individual. The author states his own post-Holocaust Nicene creed: "My faith empowers me to obey God's moral law and by my example inspire others to do the same." This is the true meaning of I John 5:3. Put simply, Idinopulos eloquently pleads for the necessity of *tikkun olam* (mending, repair, or restoration) of the world following the rupture caused by the Holocaust.

Idinopulos challenges his fellow Christians to confront the reality that post-Holocaust Christianity urgently requires theological self-critique. He writes that the meaning of sacrificial atonement has lost its credibility. Discerning both a true and an idealized (false) portrayal of Jesus' torment on the cross, Idinopulos observes that the true portrayal is the one which has Jesus cry out to God, 'Why hast thou forsaken me?' The idealized or false portrayal, for its part, shows the body of Christ transfigured and stresses resurrection imagery. The true picture was responsible for the charge of deicide being leveled against the Jewish people. Elie Wiesel's portrait, in his

classic memoir *Night*, of the young boy dying slowly on the gallows, tells the truth. Christ's death "portended the fate of Jews and countless other humans in succeeding centuries." If redemption has not occurred," asks the author, "what price have Christians paid to sustain some of our cherished teachings?"

The author's Epilogue is a sensitive meditation on the role of the spirit. Following biblical teaching, he views spirit as the link between God and humanity. Spirit simultaneously sets humans as humans apart from other creatures and unites all humanity in God. The Holocaust has revealed a profound theological truth. Whenever stupidity, apathy, or fear cause the faculties of reason, will, and the imagination to turn against themselves, thereby making humans an enemy to their own kind and consequently defaming their creator, there lies the betrayal of spirit. The Holocaust and ongoing genocides reveal the universality of this betrayal. Despair is, however, not the answer.

Idinopulos views Holocaust literature as relevant to the task of both a repair of the self (*tikkun atzmi*) and a repair of the world. Such literature "seeks to restore the human criterion, revive the spirit, redeem it, so that we can face the horror and not turn away from it." Ethically anchored literature may yet prove salvific in a world largely defined by moral chaos and spiritual upheaval. Precisely because of the dangers we commonly confront, the author notes the urgency of Christians and Jews visiting each other's house, learning to appreciate differences, and to "contemplate why God in His infinite wisdom made them neighbors to inhabit the same earth." *Betrayal of Spirit* is an indispensable guide for those wishing to pursue this vital task.

Alan L. Berger  
Raddock Family Eminent Scholar Chair of Holocaust Studies  
Florida Atlantic University



## *Preface*

This book is seeded in a small incident that occurred in 1953, in my hometown of Portland, Oregon. I was eighteen, working summers to earn money for college, and would have been amazed to have been told by a “Psychic Reader” (a familiar sign in Portland windows in those years) that the jew-hatred I experienced would influence my teaching and writing. I have used the lower case in *jew-hatred* to make a point about the plain, garden-variety kind that afflicts simple, ordinary, and otherwise friendly people. These are people whose feelings are well-hidden; people whose feelings come out unexpectedly; people who would never dream of deliberately harming another human being.

I am the American-born son of Greek immigrants. As a family we were not particularly religious, but it was our habit to attend the local Greek Orthodox Church on Sundays. The church was on the other side of town where many Greek-Americans lived. Our family business, a tiny diner in West Portland, was located at the foot of a hill near the main business district. There were not many immigrant Greeks, or Greek-Americans, living in my neighborhood. But, there were a large number of Jewish families, whose sons and daughters became my friends throughout our years at Shattuck Elementary and Lincoln High Schools.

Two of my closest friends were Hershel and Victor. Hershel, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants introduced me to Victor, whose Sephardi grandparents, on his mother’s side, had immigrated from Salonica. The language in Victor’s home was Ladino, a Jewish form of medieval, Castilian Spanish, spoken by descendants of the Jews exiled from Spain. Victor’s grandparents spoke Ladino, and also Greek. I was always welcomed in Victor’s home because I happened to be the only person in the neighborhood who could converse with Victor’s grandparents in their own Greek, a language they had not spoken since leaving Salonica for Portland after the First World War.

Portland is a lovely city whose natural beauty I never appreciated until I had to walk the flat streets of Chicago. I remember the people of

Portland as a sweet, friendly people; people willing to help; people of the old conservatism; people who retained the habits of the original New England pioneer stock that settled our town. In those years Portlanders were a tolerant people, cleaving to the middle way, avoiding extremes. It cannot have changed much in the half century which divides the incident of jew-hatred from my telling of it.

Because Portland is an inland seaport, immigrants — particularly from Asia — were a common sight there. This was particularly true after the war when the internment camps were opened for the Japanese to go back to their homes. One day, sometime after the war, we went to Shattuck to find a bunch of Japanese-American kids in school. We also found a handful of gypsy kids whose parents, shipyard workers during the war, had moved into many of the apartments on our side of town that proudly displayed the “Psychic Reader” signs.

So there we all were at Shattuck Elementary: Japanese, Gypsies, Jews, Greeks, and an assortment of undecipherable kids. Our teachers (models of common-sense rationality) were determined to mold us as Americans. It seems they succeeded because we thought of ourselves as Americans first and only secondarily as hyphenates.

Having become “American,” and believing that everyone I knew at Shattuck was “American,” you can imagine my surprise when I discovered not everyone felt the same way. This happened when I encountered my first honest-to-God anti-Semite and this book began its long journey on to these pages.

Only now, years later, do I recognize how this encounter would influence my life. It was like discovering that one of those small, hidden, sweet mountain streams feeding the Columbia River was actually polluted. I would not again encounter an anti-Semite for years, at least not in so pure and simple a form. It was so pure, so simple, so utterly stupid, and I think that is why I never forgot it. I think that is why the incident would stay with me to this day, fifty years later.

The incident was an unexpected remark made about Victor by Steve, who was the manager of a garage servicing inter-city buses. Steve was our beloved and trusted Steve, who fixed, without charge, any gadget that ceased to function properly in our family’s diner. My mother relied on Steve. She regularly made lunch for him and refused money from Steve only to find that he would regularly leave a tip worth more than the cost of the meal.



I was grateful to Steve for my summer job. Because of increased bus service Steve was given money by the company to put on summer help to wash and clean the additional buses needed for business. Knowing that I was saving money for college and without my having to ask for it, Steve offered me a job.

One day, after returning from lunch Steve came up to me, as I finished hosing down a bus, and asked how good a pal Victor was. I told him that Victor and Hershel were my best friends. Steve didn't know Hershel but he had seen Victor and me together many times going to and from basketball.

"Don't trust Victor, Tommy" Steve said, "Don't trust him. He's a Jew. Right, Tommy? Damn Jew." Flabbergasted, and a bit afraid, I didn't know what to say. There was no mistaking the hostility in Steve's voice.

Weakly, defensively, I replied: "We just play basketball together, Steve. We go to the B.B. to play basketball." The B.B. was the local Jewish Community Center of the B'nai Brith, and was walking distance from home.

"Start going to the Y downtown," Steve shot back. "Forget the little Jew."

I remember thinking to myself that it was true that Victor stood five feet, four. Yes, he was short. But did he deserve this? Suppose he stood a foot taller, would he still be the "little Jew?" This was the absurd nature of the thoughts that ran through my head. And there was this added absurdity. Victor wasn't a Jew anyway. Not in my eyes. He was Victor. It disturbed me that Steve had put this "Jew-thing" on Victor, and on me. It disturbed me because I liked Steve, and I liked my job, and I liked that Steve helped my mother at the diner.

Steve didn't have to tell me that Victor was a Jew. So what, that Victor was a Jew. Victor was my friend. Victor went to a synagogue like Hershel. So what? We all had to go somewhere to do prayers. I did them, too, in the Greek church. Victor was no more a Jew than me. We were Americans.

When Steve burst out with his "Victor-Jew-thing," I felt embarrassed for Steve; embarrassed for Victor; embarrassed for myself. When Steve said what he said, I stood before him, hose in my hands, water running down the side of the bus and I felt myself heating-up with shame. I remember thinking to myself that I should keep this quiet, and especially I should keep this from my mother. She was no less fond of Victor than she was of Steve.

It also occurred to me that Victor, known for his quick tongue, might have brought this on himself. Maybe he had said something out of turn to Steve. It might have happened on one of the many occasions when Victor had seen Steve in my mother's diner. I asked Steve if this was the case. No reply from Steve. Then the words came again from his mouth, "No-good, damned little Jew."

"Why?" I asked. No immediate reply from Steve. Then the hammer fell. After what must have been two minutes that felt like two hours, Steve shook his head. Looking me straight in the face, he said, "Hitler did right. Only didn't kill enough of them."

I was really stunned. Steve could see my reaction. The facial muscles in his face relaxed. He told me again not to trust Victor, not to play basketball with him. I distinctly recall feeling cold inside. I remembered thinking that I should be careful not to tell Steve that on that very evening I was going with Victor to the B.B. after work.

This incident, as I said, occurred in the early 1950s. While the McCarthy hearings were falling from public favor, fear of the foreigner was still in the air. Who was and who was not an American was a question which mattered to ordinary people. Memories of the war in Europe were still fresh in our minds. Eisenhower was president. Maybe that was why our teachers hurried to make us Americans.

In later years I would recognize something deep in Steve's gut, something unfathomable in Steve's outburst against Victor. I don't know who coined the expression, the *eternal Jew*. But, if he had thought long about it, he could have just as easily spoken of the *eternal jew-hater*.

Certainly, our beloved Steve was an honest-to-God jew-hater. The sight of Victor, his very presence, offended, maybe even threatened Steve — and, seemingly, for no reason: no reason, that is, other than knowing that, as a Jew, Victor was not like Steve, who was not a Jew. Victor, like me, was American-born, but that didn't seem to count for Steve.

Irrational? It was not until years later (and then only because I had begun to study anti-Semitism) that I began to feel the weight of Steve's reaction to Victor; to feel, but hardly to fathom, the irrational power of Steve's own personal jew-hatred.

Looking back on that incident a half century later, I came to believe that if anti-Semites can exist in so friendly and sweet a city as Portland, Oregon, they can exist in places not nearly so friendly or sweet. And, if

so kind a person as our beloved garage mechanic can express anti-Semitic feelings, then anti-Semitism, beyond differences of religion and race, nation or group, is most fundamentally a matter of the human mind. Just how anti-Semitism invaded, occupied, and dominated the human mind through history is the subject of the first part of this book.

Chapters six and seven, the second part of the book, address the issue that arose when the story of Steve revealed how quickly Steve's mind moved from disdain for the Jew who was Victor, to the reference about Hitler and killing Jews. Specifically, the questions we will ask are: In what ways does the history of anti-Semitism explain the Holocaust? And, in what ways does it *not* explain the Holocaust? A closely related question is how best to explain the Holocaust — where it occurred, when, how, and why? Other questions rise out of the more technical concerns of historiography: How do we explain the unexplainable? What should we make of the Intentionalism/Functionalism debates among historians? What was the role of religion in Nazi thinking?

The third part of this book consists of chapters rising out of my own post-doctoral work and writing, after being educated in a Christian institution, the University of Chicago Divinity School. Over the years the questions I have posed to myself were: What difference does the history of the contempt we know as anti-Semitism, and the genocidal murder of Jews make to me as a person born to and raised by Greek-Orthodox parents? What difference does my study of the Holocaust make, or should it make, to my self-understanding as a Christian?

I rarely refer to my own Christianity because from an early age I was powerfully influenced by the writings of Søren Kierkegaard to think of Christian identity as subjective, something experienced as intensely personal, a faith exemplified in works of love — something never made public, or talked about, or (God forbid) worn as an emblem. In his book, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard modeled religious faith after Patriarch Abraham, who was given the divine command to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham became Kierkegaard's "knight of faith" because he was willing to obey God's terrible command to bind Isaac for sacrifice. Or, perhaps even more so, because Abraham kept silent about the command. Abraham did not relieve the terrible burden by sharing it with others. He accepted responsibility personally and wholly.

There are, however, moments in history when events force us to reveal who we are as Christians, what we think and what we do as Christians.

There are moments when each of us is commanded by God, for truth's sake, to metaphorically bind for sacrifice our beloved only son. The test of the truth-of-faith is full compliance with the divine command, full responsibility for the truth, It does not lie in the making it easy on oneself, nor in the easing of the burden by sharing it with others. The truth-of-faith comes from each one fully and wholly accepting the truth for himself and herself. The history of anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust, is such a moment — a moment for a Christian to face the truth and how it matters, or ought to matter, in one's own life.

Many Jewish theologians have courageously addressed themselves to the meaning and truth of Judaism for themselves as Jews — after Auschwitz. However, the sad thing is how very few Christian thinkers have done the same. Few Christian scholars have raised what ought to be the central questions: What is the meaning of Christian faith — after Auschwitz? What must we think, do, and be as Christians in light of the fires shed by this event we know in Hebrew as the *Shoah*?

These questions were not at the forefront of my studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School in the seven years of my study there (1958-1965). My doctoral studies included the requirement to construct a personal statement of some length of my theological self-understanding. I remember doing this without ever mentioning, or even thinking about, the *Shoah*. Today, I should say, for myself and others, that if Christianity is to practice integrity (truth) of faith, then these questions about the Holocaust, the *Shoah*, must be at the forefront of our lives and our thinking. These questions are for Christians, no less than for Jews, as together we face the future in a post-Holocaust world.

## Part One

Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism:  
Are There Differences Through History?



*Jew-hatred:  
Greco-Roman Times to the Spanish Exile*

That anti-Semitism arises from an irrational fear expressed through lies and malice against Jews will be obvious from the definitions of anti-Semitism well-stated by historian David Berger: "Hostility toward Jews as a group which results from no legitimate cause or greatly exceeds any reasonable, ethical response to genuine provocation," and "a pejorative perception of Jewish physical or moral traits which is either utterly groundless or a result of irrational generalization and exaggeration."<sup>1</sup>

What is not so obvious is an explanation for one of the most extraordinary facts about anti-Semitism is its longevity. We know that anti-Semitism goes back at least through Hellenistic times. Because of its longevity we might mistakenly suppose that anti-Semitism is a single undifferentiated entity moving constantly through time. This, however, is not so! anti-Semitism and its close kin, anti-Judaism, evolved because of changing social, political, and religious circumstances through the centuries: From Greek and Roman antagonism towards the "other" ("dislike of the unlike" is Salo Baron's apt phrase); to religious contempt of Jews and Judaism during the long period of mediaeval Christianity; and from there to modern hatred of Jews based on nineteenth century conceptions (or misconceptions) of race, people, and nation — concepts which produced catastrophic consequences in the era of German Nazism.

Yet, to acknowledge changes and development in approaching anti-Semitism/anti-Judaism is only begging the question if we do not also ask what it is about Jews and Judaism that they commonly should be objects of hostility throughout many centuries. And, there is a second, closely related question: How is anti-Judaism related to anti-Semitism? Thus, the task before us in this essay is descriptive and analytical. I want to trace the development of anti-Semitism/anti-Judaism through history. To do that adequately requires at least an entire book, if not more. Even though I cannot do that here, what I can do is to suggest signposts and milestones on this wretched road of Jew-hatred from Hellenistic times to the Nazi period.

That is the descriptive half of my task. The other half, the analytical, is to achieve insight into the nature of the contempt against Jews and Judaism that has persisted throughout centuries in the midst of historical change and cultural difference.

*Hostility Towards Jews in the Graeco-Roman world.*

I feel that the first antagonisms toward the Jews in antiquity resulted from the fact that the Jews appeared as a closed group with a unique religious consciousness, whose faith compelled its withdrawal from the surrounding society. The world reacted to this withdrawal with hostility, at which Jewry withdrew even more. One can debate at length about how it began, but both sides undoubtedly contributed.<sup>2</sup>

“...both sides undoubtedly contributed.” In those four words Jacob Katz, the eminent sociologist of anti-Semitism, sweeps away any simplistic notion that antagonism between Jews and pagans in antiquity can be explained by out-and-out Jew-hatred in the plain sense of those words. For if Jews themselves, by their own special beliefs and particular behavior “contributed” to the antagonism directed against them, then historical-cultural circumstances must be included in any accurate accounting of anti-Semitism in the ancient world.

First, let us begin by focusing on political relations. The historical evidence shows toleration of Jews on the part of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic governments that ruled the remnants of the former Macedonian empire. The same government policy of toleration was continued by imperial Rome, despite three major anti-government rebellions waged by Jews from the middle of the first century to the middle of the second century. What lay behind this toleration was the practical wisdom of Greek and Roman rulers. They knew that governing a vast multi-ethnic polyglot empire, from whose subjects it was necessary to extract taxes, required avoiding rebellion. Louis Feldman reminds us that the ruling class of Greek and Romans required a managerial class that could administer affairs of empire, including the all-important matter of tax collection. Jews because of their literacy became an important part of this class.<sup>3</sup>

Because of sheer numbers and effective proselytizing, the Jews constituted one of the most sizable segments of the important commercial city



of Alexandria and also one of the largest minorities in the Roman Empire. It would have been folly for any government to alienate such a large, influential, and literate population, whose skills were needed for administering the empire.<sup>4</sup>

For their part Jews considered it practical wisdom to cultivate excellent relations with Greek and Roman rulers. Thus was established the Jews' *vertical* relations to government, relations that could not help but cost Jews their *horizontal* relations with the pagan masses. Ordinary pagans resented Jews their separateness, which made them appear alien, clannish, privileged, and haughty. In addition, the special privileges Jews secured from the emperor in the form of exemptions from cult sacrifices (a civic duty) made Jews appear in pagan eyes irreligious, atheistic, and unpatriotic.

But, what was unpatriotic to the pagan was faithfulness to the Jew. As Katz observed, the Jew, in distinguishing himself as a Jew, could not but provoke the pagan Gentile. One should also say that in the ordinary pagan mind, the "alien" quality attributed to Jews and Judaism was made inevitable by the disastrous Jewish rebellions fought against Roman forces in 66–73; 112–115; 132–135, all occurring in the Common Era. As a result of these wars Jews found themselves forced to live outside their ancestral homeland. Instead they lived in the major towns of Syria, Egypt, Greece, and Italy, where they came into contact with the pagan masses. This somewhat sudden appearance of great numbers of Jews in a relatively short span of time in the predominately pagan culture could not but produce conflicts between Jews and pagans, as it did in the city of Alexandria, Egypt.

Another contributing factor in these tensions was the success of an active proselytizing Judaism, which especially provoked Roman intellectuals, as evidenced by the disgruntled remark of the Stoic thinker, Seneca, who wrote in the mid-first century, "...the customs of this accursed [Jewish] race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout all the world. The vanquished have given their laws to the victor."<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that the Jewish influence that occasioned Seneca's sarcasm was a source of undisguised pride on the part of the Roman-Jewish historian Josephus, who, at the end of the first century CE, wrote:

The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observance; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, not a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on

the seventh day has not spread, and where fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed ... and as God permeates the universe, so the Law has found its way among all mankind.<sup>6</sup>

Sheer numbers and vigorous proselytizing alone, however, could not account for the antagonisms that developed between Jews and pagans in Alexandria. Jews demanded civil rights while showing disdain for cultic observances at the shrines for the local gods. In addition, Jews were known to enjoy wealth, privileges, and influence in high government places. The riot which broke out in Alexandria in 38 CE was caused less by Jew-hatred than by pagan resentment of the privileges Jews acquired from the ruling Roman government. Jewish demands for citizenship contributed to rioting because citizenship meant avoidance of taxes imposed on foreign residents. Further, the emergence of ultra-nationalistic Greek political clubs expressed their patriotism through hatred of Rome and, therefore, of Jews, because Jews were seen as benefiting from Rome. Roman concessions to Jews of exemptions from military service and from observing the cult of emperor worship provoked the bloody Diaspora War of 115–117 CE, pitting Jews against Greek pagans, again in Alexandria.<sup>7</sup>

The ever-enlarging minority of rich and influential Jews was also resented by Greek and Roman intellectuals who shared many of the common perception of Jews as an alien and troublesome people.<sup>8</sup> Such renowned writers as Cicero, Horace, Plutarch, Juvenal and Tacitus objected to the strange Jewish customs, which included prohibitions against idolatry and the consumption of swine, a food commonly regarded in the Greco-Roman world as so delicious that some cults championed the pig as a deity. The Jewish practice of refraining from labor on the Sabbath was seen as an inducement to laziness. Intellectuals also took offense at what they saw as the barbaric practice of circumcision. The Jewish belief in one supremely ethical invisible imageless deity, was in the minds of the intellectuals “virtually incomprehensible.” (John Gager) Roman intellectuals shared with the pagan masses the complaint that Jews were unpatriotic for refusing to participate in sacrifices to the emperor and misanthropic for prohibiting intermarriage with gentile spouses.

The attitude of ordinary and educated alike was that Jews were upstarts who might one day gain enough power to rule over them. Their fears fueled

tensions and boiled over occasionally in mob violence. Yet, when carefully considered, the attitudes of the ordinary and educated people do not suggest the irrational quality of Jew-hatred we associate with anti-Semitism. To repeat what has been said, the circumstances of great numbers of Jews in pagan cities, and the successful proselytizing in behalf of a religion, whose deity and rituals was seen as alien and threatening, could only produce tensions and provoke conflict. In that respect, Professor Katz was correct to say that Jews themselves contributed to the hostility pagans directed against them.

Katz's insight runs counter to the assertion of the historian of Jewish culture, Salo Baron, who wrote that "Almost every note in the cacophony of medieval and modern anti-Semitism was sounded by the chorus of ancient writers."<sup>9</sup> The key word here is "Almost." Without that qualification Baron's assertion suggests a single monolith of anti-Semitism moving from one period to another, unchanged, despite new events and changes of culture. Again, Professor Katz had a keener awareness of the absence of a monolith in anti-Semitism when he writes: "What took place in mediaeval times is essentially different from what happened in antiquity."<sup>10</sup>

### *Anti-Judaism in Paul's Thought*

The essential difference cited by Professor Katz is Christianity, a religion that emerged from Judaism but which found itself developing independently of its Jewish matrix. Within fifty years of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, and certainly by the close of the first century, the writers of the Gospels were defining their faith in Jesus as the prophesied messiah in opposition to Judaism. It is important to say that the patterns of anti-Judaism appearing in the New Testament have less to do with any sort of anti-Semitic animus in the New Testament writers themselves than with the struggles experienced by the earliest followers of Jesus to define their own unique belief in Jesus as the messiah and this belief's relationship to Jews and Judaism.<sup>11</sup>

The crucial period in understanding this struggle lies in the early years following the death of Jesus. In those years there was formed the original group of Jews united by commonly-held beliefs: that Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected from the dead; that he was the prophesied messiah; that he would return to earth in glory; and that this return, the Second Coming, would herald the Kingdom of God. To the original group of Nazarenes

(early followers of Jesus) was soon added the apostleship of Saul of Tarsus, who would become known as Saint Paul. He was a Pharisee trained in the religious law, who went from being a persecutor of the original Nazarenes to being a fervent adherent.

The teachings and death of Jesus and the activities of his followers went largely unnoticed by the vast majority of Jews in the early period of the first century. Jews continued to adhere to the traditional messianic expectation in Israel's eventual triumph over her enemies, a belief that had religious and nationalistic overtones. We have scant knowledge of the person of Jesus himself. The Gospel accounts of Jesus are religious testaments (not historical-biographical records) written out of faith for the faithful, accounts proclaiming the messiahship of Jesus. From these Gospel accounts we can surmise that Jesus was a Galilean Jew, of a working-class family, educated traditionally in the religious law, who in his mature years was inspired to embark on a career of messianic preaching.

Historians agree that the original followers of Jesus, the Nazarenes, were an obscure Jewish sect, and in time would have probably died out. That they did not was due to the vision and energy of Paul, who made several missionary journeys to convince Gentiles of the truth of Messiah Jesus. Paul's ideas and activities proved crucial in transforming the Nazarene sect into the world-historical religion of Christianity. Having said that, it is necessary to add that there is no reason to doubt that Paul differed from his fellow Nazarenes in believing that in championing the messiahship of Jesus, they were doing so within the framework of Jewish messianic hope for the nation of Israel.

It was not the proclamation of Jesus' messiahship that separated Christianity from Judaism, for Judaism had known other proclaimed messiahs. The force that separated Christianity and Judaism was provided by Paul's missionary preaching, as evidenced in his letters. Paul preached a new and different interpretation of the religious law: that the Jewish law was a necessary instrument for revealing human wrongdoing, but not a sufficient vehicle for establishing the right human relationship to God. What human beings needed beyond the law was faith, specifically faith in Jesus Christ, whose crucifixion, Paul contended, was atonement, remitting sins before the law, and restoring the right relationship to God.

While we may be sure that the Damascus Road experience was crucial in changing Saul the persecutor into Paul the converted, we cannot be sure

of what that experience consisted. We can be certain, though, that when Paul embarked on his new life, armed with his belief in Christ Jesus and his different interpretation of the law, he encountered opposition from Jews, particularly from Pharisees, who were recognized champions of the ritual and moral law. That opposition increased as Paul's message was increasingly heard by pagan Gentiles, a message that now included a relaxing of Jewish ritual law. Opposition to Paul intensified as Gentiles were told that they did not have to conform to the Jewish requirement of circumcision to be accepted into the new saving fellowship of Christ Jesus.

The letters of Paul also make it clear that the decision to relax Jewish ritual law also offended Paul's fellow disciples who, like Stephen and Jesus' brother, continued to insist that conformity to Jewish ritual law was necessary for acceptance into the fellowship of believers. Most importantly, Paul's radically new statement of faith, subordinating law to faith and relaxing for Gentiles the Jewish requirement of circumcision, was pivotal in defining Christianity as a religion separate and distinct from Judaism.

To repeat, it is doubtful that Paul deliberately set out to found a new religion based on Christ Jesus. For Paul makes clear in chapters 9–11 of his Letter to the Romans that he is a devout Jew, who believes that eventually his fellow-Jews will be moved by God's grace to accept Jesus as the Messiah (Christ) and find salvation. Although Paul did not deliberately found a new religion, a new religion did in fact emerge from his radically new definitions of law and faith, welcoming the uncircumcised Gentiles, putting them on a level of equality with circumcised Jews. In these innovations seeds of antagonism were sown with the upholders of Jewish ritual orthodoxy, including some of the original Nazarenes.

That Paul was an innovator cannot be doubted. He was an innovator not by setting forth to establish a new religion different from Judaism, but by challenging Jewish ritual orthodoxy, challenges through which a new religion perforce developed. Why did Paul want to challenge Jewish ritual orthodoxy? Was he aware that in doing so he was providing the basis of a new religion? These questions cannot easily be answered. Joseph Klausner, the Jewish scholar of early Christianity, contends that the innovative aspects of Paul's thinking can be traced to Paul's origins in the Syrian Diaspora community.<sup>12</sup> Paul, despite his training in Jewish law, was influenced by pagan religious notions of the dying-and-rising savior god. Such notions opened Paul to belief in a messiah who was not a national or

military hero, as Jewish orthodoxy traditionally interpreted the messianic agent of redemption. Klausner further speculates that in his struggle to present Jesus's messiahship in a way acceptable to pagan Gentiles, Paul found himself modifying the requirements of Jewish ritual law.

### *Causes of Anti-Judaism in the Gospels*

Both Paul's ideas and mission to the Gentiles, and the antagonism of Jews to his ideas and mission, were later to influence the writing of the four Gospels in negative ways. Catholic historian Edward Flannery states the connection clearly: "...in the early years, as the Church's severance from the parent body became complete, the negative aspects stressing Judaism's replacement were greatly accentuated, and a less benevolent tradition was destined to overshadow the Pauline doctrine."<sup>13</sup> This is an accurate statement from which I must demur only in Flannery's reference to "Pauline doctrine." For, if what I have been arguing has merit, then it is not despite "Pauline doctrine" but because of it that the seed of anti-Judaism was sewn. It was inevitable that when Paul argued the priority of faith to law in the relationship to God, it would not take long for believers in Jesus Christ to assert the superiority of faith to law, hence the superiority of Christianity representing the "new Israel," replacing the discredited "old Israel" of traditional Judaism. The note of superiority of Christian belief is sounded throughout the Gospels: in the caricaturing of the "pharisees and scribes" as "blind guides" and "hypocrites;" in the distorted depiction of Jesus's death; in the inflammatory rhetoric of John's Gospel.<sup>14</sup>

The anti-Judaic theme woven into the Synoptic Gospels is shown in the dramatic last days of Jesus leading up to his execution. Here the intention was to shift the blame for execution from the Roman military to the Jewish people. Thus, in the scene in which Jesus is interrogated by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor is shown as washing his hands of the crime and the Jewish crowd is shown accepting responsibility.

Only a believer in the inerrancy of scripture would accept the literal truth of the Gospel story of Jesus last days, and ignore the salient fact that Jesus was crucified (a Roman form of execution) and not stoned (the Jewish method of capital punishment). The more likely fact about the Gospel accounts of Jesus' death is that these accounts reveal the writers' wish to absolve Jewish and Gentile Christians of any blame for the Jewish

rebellion against Rome occurring in the period in which the Gospel stories were written.

That the majority of Jews and their leaders rejected the messianic claims made for Jesus was undoubtedly painful to Christians. Greater pain for Christians lay in the increasing anti-Roman attitudes of Jewish revolutionaries, a development that culminated in the Roman-Jewish war of 66–73 CE. These calamitous events had a devastating effect on Christians, who found it important for their survival under Roman rule to show their loyalty to the government and their disapproval of the defeated people.

Anti-Judaism intensifies in the Gospel of Matthew, written after the Great War, in the last three decades of the first century. Note the scene in which Barabbas is released and Jesus is condemned at the request of the chief priests and elders. (Matthew 27:20–26, RSV) The intention of Matthew is not only to shift blame from the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate to the chief priests and elders, but also to discredit the Jews as God's covenant people. The discrediting strikes a resounding chord when the narrator has the Jewish crowd utter self-condemnation in the words, "His blood be on us and our children." (Matthew 27:25, RSV) Here, perhaps for the first time, we encounter sentiments that cross the line from anti-Judaism (hostile feeling flowing inevitably from competing religious systems) to anti-Semitic Jew-hatred. For here the focus of contempt is on a particular group of hostile Jews who are depicted as speaking for all Jewish people at all times.

In chapter eight of John's Gospel the repeated reference to "the Jews" virtually becomes a racial stereotype, upon which scorn is heaped:

Jesus said to [the Jews], 'If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him.

—John 8: 43–44, RSV

The inevitability of a Christian superiority rising out of Paul's doctrine of faith before law was given fuel by the events that occurred between the writing of Paul's letters in 30–60 CE, and the writing of John's Gospel at the

end of the first century. The important developments during this period were: the continued deterioration of Roman-Jewish relations culminating in the outbreak of war in 66 CE; the destruction of the Jewish Temple, which “proved” to Gentiles that Judaism was a discredited religion; and the growing mutual antagonism between Jews and Gentile Christians, exacerbated by their on-going rivalry to win over pagan converts.

In this rivalry Christianity proved the victor. But it didn’t look that way to Christians in the first three hundred years of their struggle to win out over Jews and Judaism. Jewish hostility towards Christians was shown in the continued rejection of the claims of the church, in the refusal to accept the legitimacy of the Jewish-Christians, in the rabbinical decree that branded Christians *minim*, heretics to be shunned.<sup>15</sup> Jewish hostility against Christians exploded in Nero’s persecution of Christians, an incident which the church father Clement of Rome accused Jews of instigating.

During this period Jews and Christians actively competed for conversions of pagans. Also it seems that Jewish ritual continued to appeal even to Christians who were derided as “Judaizers” for wanting to circumcise their infant boys, eat kosher food, and observe the Jewish Sabbath.

### *Flannery on the Question of Anti-Semitism in the New Testament*

One of our most widely read historians of anti-Semitism, Edward Flannery, writes that the Gospel writer John has been called the “the father of anti-Semitism.” However, he (Flannery) does not say that John was an anti-Semite, thereby leaving the question of anti-Semitism open. It is a question we can address here.

Reading through, in turn, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John evidence of contempt for Jews and Judaism mounts. In my judgment, the anti-Judaism of these writings is the seed of the anti-Semitism that came later. But, does that make these writings anti-Semitic? If the historical-cultural context of struggle between Jews and Christians is considered, then the anti-Judaism, including John’s reference to “the Jews,” (as New Testament scholar John Townsend has shown) is explained and understood.<sup>16</sup>

Is there anti-Semitism in the New Testament? The answer is technically no. Anti-Judaism is not technically anti-Semitism. But the technical distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism is a distinction that perhaps only academics appreciate. For when anti-Judaism is so intimately



connected to anti-Semitism, so logically and historically productive of Jew-hatred, (this particular seed producing this particular fruit), must we not then conclude that anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, are uniquely and importantly, one?

Flannery, who relies heavily on the technical distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, reaches a different conclusion. His argument deserves to be quoted in full.

... anti-Semitism is 1) not theological anti-Judaism, even though it may contain the latter, nor 2) negative prophetic statements delivered within a Jewish ambience, nor 3) elements that may lead — or in history have lead — to anti-Semitism; but finally, 4) attitudes, words or actions that embody a hatred or contempt of the Jewish people *as such*. (The reduplicative, *as such*, is the formal and most important factor in the definition.) In light of such a definition, it is the opinion of the writer that the New Testament cannot be considered anti-Semitic, this despite the fact that it is replete with an anti-Judaistic theology and anti-Jewish pronouncement, prophetic in nature, that have made it a seedbed of anti-Semitism.<sup>17</sup>

In evaluating the argument of this highly respected and progressive Catholic writer, I would have to express my dissent. In my own opinion (to use Flannery's own categories) when "theological anti-Judaism" contains anti-Semitism and also has historically led to anti-Semitism, then one must recognize the causal connection between seed and fruit. Further, Flannery's careful but undue restriction of anti-Semitism to "hatred or contempt of the Jewish people *as such*" has the effect of dismissing, minimizing, and obscuring the fertile ground into which the anti-Semitic seed was sown. His definition of anti-Semitism is an exclusively race-based definition which ignores the scriptural traditions that provided the language and thought-forms which worked to open the way for modern racial anti-Semitism.

It does not take great learning to understand that when Gospel writer Matthew has the Jewish people condemning themselves for all eternity for the murder of Christ, ("his blood be on us and our children," Matthew 27: 25) this "self-condemnation" recited for centuries in church catechisms and liturgies is a bomb-like utterance with explosive consequences for Jews everywhere, at all times. The motive force of the Passion narratives in the Gospels was not merely to politically ingratiate the early Jewish-Christians

with the Roman government; it was also to discredit the Jewish people religiously, to invalidate them as God's people. The politics of religious diversity and toleration of "the other," practiced by Greek and Roman rulers toward their Jewish subjects, was not the same politics practiced by the Gospel writers towards their Jewish rivals.

### *Contempt for Jews and Judaism in the Early Church*

In the first three hundred years of its existence the church was a struggling church, locked in combat with the synagogue over who possessed the truth, and competing with Jews for converts among the pagans. It is during this period that the most important elements comprising anti-Judaism, the *adversus Judaeus* tradition, were recorded by the gospel writers and by such early Christian theologians as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Origen, John Chrysostom, and Augustine of Hippo. Of increasing concern to Christian thinkers was the continuing attractiveness of Jewish ethics and rituals to pagans and to Gentile Christians.

What should a Christian think about Jews and Judaism was the chief question faced by Christians in the three hundred years that saw Christianity emerge triumphantly from Roman persecution to establish itself as the official religion of the empire. What should a Christian think about Jews and Judaism? Two different answers were given to this question. The first, provided by John Chrysostom, was wholly negative. Chrysostom, feeling beleaguered by Christian "Judaizers" was condemnatory of Jews and their religion. In the sermons he preached in Antioch in the late fourth century he castigates Jews in vitriolic and violent language. Jews are "lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits." What is their synagogue but the domicile of the devil? And their religion is a disease, the worship of the devil.<sup>18</sup>

The other and different answer, given in the fifth century by Augustine of Hippo, was a mixture of positive and negative elements.<sup>19</sup> Augustine took the view that Jews were in error for reading but ignoring the scriptural prophecies pointing to Jesus Christ. They deserve to be punished by God who revealed through the Hebrew prophetic scriptures the truth of Jesus Christ. And, indeed, God has punished the Jewish nation as witnessed in their history of defeat, exile, and suffering.

The positive side of Augustine's argument, influenced by Paul's theology, is that despite their sinfulness, Jews remain God's chosen covenant

people to whom the moral law was graciously vouchsafed. So, how then are these compatible? How does Augustine reconcile grace, revelation and chosenness on one side, and on the other side, sin and punishment? Augustine answers by giving a Christian twist to Paul's notion of God's providential use of the Jews.

Paul had written in his *Romans* letter that Jews rejected Jesus Christ because their hearts were deliberately hardened by God so that the Gentiles would first come to Christ, after which the Jews would then follow, out of "jealousy." Augustine twists Paul's argument by asserting that the Jews' history of defeat and suffering evidences the truth of Hebraic prophesy of Israel's punishment. Further, this "truth," under Augustine's allegorical interpretation, points beyond Israel to Jesus Christ as the redeemer of Jews and all humanity.

What then should be the proper Christian attitude towards the Jews? Augustine's answer was an appeal to Christian love and prayer. The Christian must love the Jew as the one who came before in the economy of God's grace and the Christian must pray for the conversion of the Jew to faith in Jesus Christ — an event which will precede the Second Coming of Christ, and the Kingdom of God.

Kenneth B. Stow points out that Augustine's "two-sided picture of the Jews" was influenced by Roman Imperial Law (published in 438 as the *Codex Theodosianus*) as his own doctrine guided Papal decisions affecting Jews.<sup>20</sup> This legislation accorded Jews status as citizens of the empire, and affirmed their communal and ritual rights. But the legislation also clearly restricted their actions, placing them in a position subordinate to Christians. Jews could not serve as judges or military officers, for that would suggest their superiority to Christians. Stow writes, that "As legal inferiors, Jews were to live as "the elder serving the younger," a figure borrowed by Augustine from Paul.<sup>21</sup>

Looking back through the centuries we can say that it was fortunate for the Jewish people that the theology of Augustine and not that of Chrysostom shaped the intellectual life of the medieval church. For Augustine provided the all-important theological justification for the toleration of Jews that would influence the majority of Catholic popes throughout the Middle Ages. The policy of toleration was of course limited or restricted. Toleration could easily become intolerance and persecution when the church faced a crisis or when the pious zeal of Christians, monks, or

the mob, or both, overwhelmed wiser heads governing the church. When that happened, the language of Chrysostom would reappear to justify mayhem and murder.

### *Jews in the Medieval World*

The expansion of civilization from the Mediterranean basis to Northern Europe in the five hundred years period between 1000 and 1500 CE involved an extraordinary growth in population, agriculture, trade, capital, and towns. The participation and predicament of Jews in this expansion is explained by Robert Chazan in a superbly sketched essay on the settlement of Ashkenazi Jews in this region. Chazan begins by noting that “it was precisely the material progress that made Jewish immigration attractive to some of the most far-sighted political authorities of the area and made this newly developed region attractive to farsighted Jews.”<sup>22</sup> Medieval society of Northern Europe proved sufficiently flexible to absorb the “anomalous Jews” who did not fit into the newly evolving order. But, as Chazan goes on to argue, the order was inherently unstable and given to violence, especially to a small and vulnerable group like the Jews.

The increased physical security and political sophistication in managing a feudal social and economic system forged a “direct feudal bond between overlord and vassal” and produced by the late eleventh century “increasingly secure states...constructed on the original feudal bond.”<sup>23</sup> Despite the political order the “anomalous Jews” were accommodated because their literacy, industry, and talents were prized by the political and ecclesiastical leaders of the feudal order. Responding to opportunities for material prosperity and to physical security Jews in number migrated from the Mediterranean areas into Northern Europe.

Confined largely to trade, Jews formed small insulated communities in virtually all the new and enlarging towns. Isolated, but never exactly sealed off from the wider non-Jewish society, they learned to speak the local language, but contacts beyond business dealings were minimal. When the church began its campaign to abolish the practice of usury among Christians, Jews were prized as experienced in banking and finance. Only Jews could function as money-lenders at a time in which great sums of money were needed to finance constructions and projects needed to sustain the developing civilization.

But, as Chazan said, the political order was “inherently unstable and given to violence.” Known to every peasant, priest, and nobleman was the fact that the Jew was not a Christian — a fact for which the festival calendar marking the Easter week was an annual reminder. It was at Easter week that feelings of anti-Jewish hostility would run high in village and town. Mob action would be contained or prevented only by the wisdom of bishop or pope or prince. The ancient pattern of Roman imperial protection of a favored and privileged Jewish minority was thus carried into medieval times.

It was also at Easter week that Christians were reminded by the Gospel accounts of the Passion that Jews were made responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The deicide charge, first voiced by Justin Martyr in the second century, was revived annually in the Easter festival, which coincided with the Jewish celebration of Passover. The deicide charge would in time give rise to the blood-libel slander, a slander which accuses Jews of kidnapping Christian children to murder them for the blood used to make the wine drunk at Passover.

We should remember that Augustine’s doctrine of toleration was after all a doctrine of *limited* toleration. No matter how faithfully the church followed this doctrine it could not prevent Jew-hatred, especially since toleration was limited by the belief that Christians were the “new Israel” in relation to whom the unbelieving Jews were opponents. For that reason Augustine’s doctrine of toleration was, as Chazan says a “complex legacy” bequeathed to medieval Christians. That legacy “...demanded a stance of toleration toward the Jews, while strongly asserting their ongoing error and hostility. Because both positive and negative attitudes were fused, it is not altogether surprising that, under intense pressure, this complex doctrine occasionally unraveled giving way to over-simplifications and distortions. The inherent complexity of the doctrine invited such unravelling.”<sup>24</sup>

The most dramatic example of this “unraveling” was the First Crusade of 1099 CE. This was the year in which noblemen of France and England undertook a military pilgrimage to Jerusalem to regain Christ’s tomb lost in battle to Islam. It was also the year in which popular obsession with the Jewish threat of contaminating the Christian social order intensified. The pilgrimage turned into a blood rampage against the Jewish communities of Speyer, Mainz, Cologne and other towns in the Rhine river valley. The Crusaders, who ultimately aimed to defeat the Muslim enemy of the church,

found it appropriate to first destroy the Jews, the “enemy within.” These actions were not examples of “incidental popular violence.” The crusaders, acting as one great mob, needed little convincing that destroying Jews had to precede the crusade against Muslims. As Chazan says, the First Crusade was “a clear reflection of new-style anti-Jewish hostility which draws its sustenance from the rich prior legacy of Christian anti-Jewish animus and from the social realities of majority and minority status in eleventh-century northern Europe.”<sup>25</sup>

Significantly, political and ecclesiastical authorities made certain that there was no repetition of the pious rampage against Jews in the Second Crusade which took place in the 1140s. The event of the First Crusade confirmed in the popular mind the perception of Jew as outsider-enemy.

The instability inherent in the developing medieval society extended to relations between Jews and Gentiles over finance and taxes. Jews practiced usury because it was materially beneficial and because society had a need of usury. But Jews paid a high price in esteem for being seen as usurers, as evidenced in the words of the otherwise estimable Bernard of Clairvaux’s, whose expression “to Jew” became a synonym for money-lending.<sup>26</sup> Chazan informs us that by the end of the twelfth century the English and French monarchies had improved the system of money-lending so as to benefit both the lender and borrower, and to enforce the collection of loans. But greed got the best of noblemen. The crown capitalized on its control of Jewish money-lending by increasing taxes so sharply that Jewish banking went into decline, with borrowers hurt for lack of loans. Chazan:

...Jewish prosperity and profitability depended ultimately on maintenance of a fine balance between ongoing governmental profit and retention of sufficient capital to keep the lending business flourishing. The extent to which Jews fell under government control destroyed that fine balance. The temptation to exploit the essentially defenseless Jews beyond the fine line was simply too great.<sup>27</sup>

The negative image of the Jew as an alien exploiter took on additional coloration in the twelfth-century popular image of Jew as the embodiment of satanic evil. This image was powerfully reinforced in Norwich, England in 1144 where the abduction of a Christian child resulted in accusations of ritual murder.

In the thirteenth-century new limitations were imposed on Jews in the form of distinctive dress and signs that would make Jews identifiable as Jews. Thus, society moved rapidly towards barriers that would separate insider from outsider, the familiar and acceptable from the alien and unacceptable. The Lateran Council of 1215 decreed the social segregation of Jews and limited Jewish money-lending. In the effort to minimize the harm that Jewish literature could do to Christians the Council prohibited the publication and dissemination of the Talmud. In the thirteenth-century Jews, appalled and terrified appealed to authorities in church and state, authorities who could do little but make pronouncements of small effect on the popular mind.<sup>28</sup> Further, ordinary people's perceptions of Jews influenced medieval art in which the dehumanized figure of the Jew was portrayed as devil, demon or animal.

Economic pressures forced Jews to migrate eastward from Northern Europe in the three hundred years from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> The medieval legacy of anti-Jewish attitudes would follow them. But even before the Jewish migration to Eastern Europe, a dark harbinger of terrible things to come occurred in late fifteenth century Spain.

### *The Spanish Exile*

On 31 March 1492, the royal majesties of Spain, King Ferdinand V of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile (known for their piety as the "Catholic Sovereigns"), decreed that all Jews who would not submit to the faith of the Church through baptism should be banished from their dominion. As a consequence an estimated 300,000 Jews were forced out of Spain. Those who refused baptism migrated to North Africa, Italy, Northern Greece, and the West coast of Asia Minor. A seldom noted fact was that until 31 July 1492, Judaism in Spain was "officially recognized, tolerated, and protected."<sup>30</sup>

What turned the "Catholic Sovereigns" against their Jewish subjects? The answer lies in the unique combinations of faith and fanaticism, of bigotry and greed that together produced the Inquisition in the fifteenth century. The Inquisition was the church's instrument of terror directed specifically against *conversos*: Jews who had insincerely converted to Christianity.

To understand fully the experience of Jews in the time of the Inquisition we must go back to the earlier time of Muslim rule in Spain. Spain was

conquered by the Moors in the seventh century. Since the conquerors had little interest in the country beyond controlling it militarily and milking it for taxes, indigenous Christians and Jews, were left free to administer affairs and develop their own cultures. During the eighth century of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba, Christians and Jews lived with security, freedom, prosperity, and hope. These were the golden years of scientific investigation and cultural expression.

The Christian struggle to re-conquer Spain from Muslims did not radically change the condition of Jewish life. For Jews and Muslims together breathed more easily when in the thirteenth century the repressive rule of the radical Muslim sect, the Almohades (who banned the practice of Judaism and Christianity on the Peninsula), was defeated. Thereafter, however, repeated Christian victories over Muslim powers instilled in both crown and church a nationalistic and religious zeal for unity in Spain. In time this zeal produced policies that would have grave consequences for the Jews of the entire Peninsula.

The battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212) was a major turning-point in Spanish history. The victory consolidated Christian control of the northern regions of Castile, Portugal, Navarre, and Aragon. After this victory Muslim powers were confined to the Kingdom of Granada in Andalusia. Control of the northern regions meant that crown and church had less need of the skills and finances of its Jewish minority. The monarchs were now more amenable than ever to the incessant cry of bishops that Catholic Spain could only preserve her victory over Islam by a renewed dedication of faith. In this attitude a deadly seed of piety and patriotism was planted in Spain. The fruit of that seed was fed to Jews.

From the beginning of the re-conquest in the eleventh century the usefulness of Jews to crown and church was well-recognized. Jews were needed and respected as educated, industrious, loyal, of high moral standards. They had risen to high social position as physicians, jurists, financiers, interpreters, advisors, army officers, tax collectors, and men-of-letters.

Yet, however much Spain valued her Jews, she was not immune to developments in Medieval Europe. The Crusades of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Church's campaign against the Albigensian heresy, the Black death — all these events had a powerfully negative repercussion on Christian-Jewish relations in Medieval Spain.



The Lateran Councils of 1179 and 1215 introduced strong measures opposing heresy, measures that would have dire consequences for Spanish Jews. In the thirteenth century religious passion, and the inflamed sermons of fanatic priests led to the sacking of the Jewish quarters of Cordoba, Toledo, and Seville. Many Jews were spared death by submission to baptism. These forced baptisms multiplied when King Henry II of Castile, heeding the counsel of church advisors, decreed the wearing of the Jewish badge. It was in this climate that Jews throughout Spain realized their security, status, and acceptance in a Christian society now depended on baptism.

We can never be sure of the numbers of Jews who became *conversos*, but it is estimated that more than 300,000 did so. As the *conversos* increased in number the number of professing Jews declined and the relations between Jews and *conversos* became immensely complex.<sup>31</sup>

With passing generations these *converso* New Christians grew in number, intermarried with Old Christians, and advanced in all aspects of society. So much did *conversos* advance that within years they could be found in all the upper classes, including the army, church hierarchy, and ranks of the nobility.

The *converso* phenomenon was produced by Spanish Catholic zeal. From this zeal also came the drive to examine the sincerity of faith among the *conversos*. The church hierarchy found itself in a dilemma: On the one side, it accepted *conversos* as New Christians, products of the effective preaching of the church's faith on the part of such firebrands as Frs. Vincent Farrer and Geronimo de Santa Fe. But, on the other side, the New Christians were suspect because in the vast majority of instances their faith was forced.<sup>32</sup>

There was also the troubling fact that the New Christians behaved as crypto-Jews, who outwardly were Christians, but inwardly and secretly continued to practice Jewish rituals. And, there were many *conversos* who didn't bother to hide the fact that they became Christians only for advantage.

In the eyes of professing Jews the "New Christians" posed a dilemma. Jews were willing to support many of the "New Christians" in the secrecy of their Judaic practice, even when the church forbade it. But for the most part they were ashamed of those Jews who submitted to forced baptism; they were called *anusim* (in faith broken) thus deserving to be called contemptuously, *marranos* (swine).

When Ferdinand and Isabella came to power in 1474, they did so with the express intention of completing the purification of the faith of Spain by eliminating heresy. A baptized New Christian who practiced Jewish rituals was judged to be in the state of heresy, deserving of punishment. In 1478 the "Catholic Sovereigns" secured from Pope Sixtus IV the right to appoint inquisitorial judges in Spain. It was a major blunder of the papacy. A most dreaded instrument passed from the hands of the wiser, more lenient Italians into the hands of fanatic Spaniards, determined to cleanse their country of heresy. The Inquisitor General named was Tomas de Torquemada, who was Isabella's childhood Father-confessor, reputed to be the son of a *converso* family.

Torquemada was indefatigable in carrying-out his duties. He appointed a vast array of investigators and interrogators, who in turn relied on numerous spies and informers. Rabbis were ordered to expose any *converso* who secretly practiced Judaism. Spies informed on anyone seen buying meat or wine from a Jewish shop, or wearing new linen on the Jewish Sabbath, or observing Jewish dietary customs, or merely associating with Jews. Virtually every *converso* was suspect. *Conversos* informed on each other to demonstrate the sincerity of their Christian faith. Moreover, as there was material advantage to becoming a *converso*, there was also material advantage for exposing a heretic because a heretic's property was confiscated, with rewards to the informer.

The Inquisition operated in every town and village over the whole of Spain. Thousands of *conversos* were investigated; hundreds were found guilty of heresy and punished. Many heretics were put to death in the elaborate public spectacle that came to be called *auto-de-fé*. The inquisition was officially established in 1480. It took only ten years for crown and church to realize that whatever good the Inquisition was intended to achieve a deeper problem lay at the root of *converso* heresy.

Finally it became obvious that the issue of *converso* regression to Judaism could not be resolved without eliminating Jews and their Judaism. When the Kingdom of Granada was recaptured in 1492 the time was ripe for completing the purification of Spain of both Muslims and Jews.

This was no simple matter because until 31 July 1492 Judaism was officially a legal religion in Spain. Consequently, a pretext was found in the old anti-Semitic blood libel for expelling Jews from Spain. Accusation was made that a Christian child had been kidnapped and later found murdered.

Torquemada put the accusation before the monarchs, with the request that the Jews of Spain be punished collectively, punished with exile, and the decree went forth on 31 March 1492 from the newly conquered Alhambra palace that in four months time any unbaptised Jew found in the royal domain would be put to death.

It did not matter that later it was determined that the accusation of child kidnapping proved false, because the child had never existed. Nor did it matter that Jews offered a vast sum of money to be spared the royal decree of expulsion. The Spanish church hierarchy, which was determined to rid itself of professing Jews once and for all, prevailed over the hesitant "Catholic Sovereigns."<sup>33</sup>

### *Foreshadowing*

The exile of Spanish Jewry in 1492 may be seen to be one of the worst instances of medieval bigotry against the Jewish minority in a Christian country. It may also be seen to be a terrifying harbinger of the dilemma of Jews in the modern world. For in the Iberian Peninsula from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, popular Christian hostility towards Jews and Judaism reached beyond ordinary religious contempt and acquired the force of a nationalistic ideology influencing crown and church alike. The history of this period shows that Spaniards of all classes came to view Jews as not authentically Spaniards. Jews came to be regarded rather as an alien presence, human beings with no legitimate place in Spain, human beings that could justifiably be expelled from the country. In this regard the decree of Ferdinand and Isabella foreshadowed by a half-millennium the actions of the Nazi leadership affecting the Jews of Germany and Austria.

We can only add here that the Nazis repeated virtually all the anti-Jewish decrees of the Medieval Christian Spaniards from yellow badge to expulsion. But the Nazis added one unique element not imagined by the Spaniards. They added the catastrophic thought that the Jews expelled were not actually human beings but an infectious bacterial agent that could and should be eliminated at all costs to themselves and the world.

## Notes

1. David Berger, "Anti-Semitism: An Overview," *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*. David Berger, ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), p. 3.
2. Jacob Katz, "The Preparatory Stage of the Modern Antisemitic Movement (1873-1879)," *Antisemitism Through the Ages*. Shmuel Almog, ed. (Oxford: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem/Pergamon Press), p. 279.
3. Louis H. Feldman, "Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World," *History and Hate*, David Berger, ed., (op. cit.), pp. 15-42.
4. The one glaring exception to Seleucid tolerance was the persecution carried out by Antiochus IV Epiphanies in 169 BCE. Professor Feldman refers to this event as an "atypical persecution" that "...can hardly be regarded as straightforward anti-Semitism, especially when we realize that as far as we know, Antiochus did not persecute the Jews in the other parts of his realm; the struggle in Judea should be viewed as a civil war between Jewish factions." Feldman, op. cit., p. 18.
5. Seneca cited in, John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 60.
6. Josephus cited in Gager, op. cit., p. 61.
7. Feldman, op. cit., pp. 21-28.
8. For a lucid discussion of Roman intellectuals' attitudes towards Jews, see Feldman, op. cit., pp. 29-36.
9. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, vol. I. (New York, 1952), p. 194.
10. Jacob Katz, op. cit., p. 279.
11. The struggle of early Christianity to define its unique message as distinct from Judaism is explained in countless books. Books which I found particularly helpful in preparing this essay were: John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*. Howard Clark Kee and Franklin W. Young, *Understanding the New Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, inc., 1957). Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times and Teaching*. Herbert Danby, trans. (New York: Menorah Publishing Co., 1925). *From Jesus to Paul*, William F. Stinespring, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946). Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). *The Writings of St. Paul*, Wayne Meeks, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, A Norton Critical Edition, 1972).
12. Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, op. cit., pp. 435-466.
13. Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 30.

14. The caricaturing of Pharisees, Scribes, and Sadducees is analyzed in: Ellis Rivkin, *A Hidden Revolution* (Nashville: Abington, 1978). Anthony J. Saldarini, *Pharisees, Scribes and Sadducees* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988). Jacob Neusner, *From Politics to Piety: The Emergence of Pharisaic Judaism*: (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973). "Analysis of the Gospels," depiction of Jesus' death is to be found in Key and Young, op. cit., ch. 5. The language of John's Gospel is analyzed in John G. Gager, op. cit., ch. 9.
15. The quarrels that occurred between Jews and early Christians, particularly at the scene of synagogue services, are treated in a detailed analysis by John T. Townsend, "The Gospel of John and the Jews: The Story of a Religious Divorce," *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, Alan Davies, ed. (New York: Paulist Press), pp. 72–97.
16. Early Jewish anti-Christian hostility is treated in Flannery, op cit., 30–33. Gager, op. cit., ch. 9. R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*. (London: Willams and Norgate, 1903).
17. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews*, op. cit., p. 33.
18. The vitriolic sermons of John Chrysostom are analyzed by W. Meeks and R. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1978).
19. Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, Marcus Dodds, trans. (New York: Random House, Modern Library, 1950). Rev. George Wilson, trans., Bk. XVIII, nos. 45–47.
20. Kenneth R. Stow, "Hatred of the Jews or Love of the Church: Papal Policy Toward the Jews in the Middle Ages," *Antisemitism Through The Ages*, Shmuel Amog, ed. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), pp. 71–89.
21. Ibid.
22. Robert Chazan, "Medieval Anti-Semitism," *History and Hate*, Berger, ed., p. 54.
23. Ibid., p. 56.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 57.
26. Ibid., p. 59.
27. Ibid., p. 61.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. 64.
30. Henry P. Salomon, New Introduction to Cecil Roth, *A History of the Marranos*, Fourth edition (New York: Hermon Press, 1974), p. x.
31. Roth, op. cit., pp. 11–28, 26–27.
32. Roth, op. cit., p. 27.

33. The story of the confrontation between Torquemada and the Monarchs over the Jewish ransom/bribe against exile has the Inquisitor forcing Isabella to refuse money in favor of exile by throwing down a crucifix before her and crying, "Here! Take Him and sell him!" Related by Rufus Lears, *Israel: A History of the Jewish People*. (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, 1966), pp. 316–17.

*Jew-hatred:  
The French Revolution to the Nazis*

Negative Christian attitudes towards Jews and Judaism, rooted in medieval bigotry, did not cease when the French Revolution curtailed the power of the church in human society. Those attitudes continued into the modern age.

Herewith a perplexing question. The culture of the modern age is defined in part by the waning of church dogma and authority through the release of secular energies, including the emancipation of western European Jewry through the bestowal of civil equality. Despite emancipation (which was of great material, social and political benefit to Jews) the old animosity which non-Jews felt toward Jews was *not* ended. Why was it not? The answer, in part, as Robert Chazan notes, is that many “failed to reckon with...the tenacity of [negative Jewish] stereotypes and the suppleness with which they could be adapted to new circumstances ...”<sup>1</sup>

The answer also is the ambiguity with which emancipation was conceived and carried-out. To understand this ambiguity let’s go back to August 1789, the period in which the National Constituent Assembly of France adopted its momentous “Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,” which contained the credo “men are born free and remain free and equal in rights.” A wordier version of that sentiment was expressed thirteen years earlier in the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence, “All men are created equal.” These two declarations would change the lives of Jews for the good. Those who could look into the future were not so sure.

The French declaration, which was followed by the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Edict of Tolerance, guaranteed to Jews an equality of rights they had not known since ancient times. Within a short time, following Bonaparte’s victorious march of conquest through Europe, Jews found themselves emancipated in Holland, Italy, England, the German states, including pre-dominant Prussia. Emancipation might also have spread to Russia, but the defeat of Napoleon at Moscow meant that Russia remained

mired in Russian Orthodox bigotry towards Jews. This would only change with the Bolshevik revolution, and then only in the brief period before the rise of Stalin and the recrudescence of anti-Semitism with a different ideological face.

Behind the emancipation of European Jewry was the philosophy of the Enlightenment. It is hard to imagine that the French Revolution could have occurred without the fertile ideas of French Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Condorcet, and D'Holbach. These thinkers first challenged the faith of the medieval church by the proposition that reason and natural experience, not revelation and dogmas of faith, are guides to knowledge and human living. Out of this challenge came the idea of social egalitarianism that directly influenced French politicians in the National Assembly to translate the Declaration of the Rights of Man into political action aimed at winning equal rights for all French Jews.

Out of Enlightenment thinking came the assumption that once the discriminations and restrictions against Jews were removed, then Jews would soon assimilate into the general society and cease to behave in ways that drew attention to their distinctiveness of dress, custom, diet, religion, and work. In other words, Jews would cease to look and think and act as Jews had traditionally done. The assumption was that once barriers were removed, Jews would fully enter the mainstream of a modern liberal society. This assumption guided many of the proponents for emancipated Jewry in France, Germany, and Austria-Hungary. Of course many did assimilate into the wider culture, particularly in Germany, but the overwhelming majority of European Jews, happy to benefit from new rights and freedoms, were not about to abandon their tradition in favor of assimilation, which most Jews saw as cultural self-effacement through a process of blending into the wider Christian culture.<sup>2</sup>

Embedded in Enlightenment thinking was another assumption, no less mistaken, that religion was essentially a matter of thinking alone; that once reason exposed the errors of religion, then every rational person, Jew and non-Jew, would merge into some sort of generalized humanity. This did not happen because it could not happen. The error of the Enlightenment thinking was in supposing that Jewish identity derived from simple overt belief alone and not from the deeper, more complex bonds of communal solidarity — social, traditional, emotional bonds forged over centuries.



To repeat, most Jews accepted the benefits that came to them as a result of emancipation, however, most retained some palpable contact with traditional Judaism. The expectation, that assimilation would obliterate Jewish distinctiveness by merging Jews into general culture, simply did not happen.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, emancipation brought new freedoms and the abolition of old restrictions. Jews were free to enter the universities, to study for and practice the professions of law and medicine, to be appointed to positions in civil administration. Gradually abolished were the poll tax, and restrictions on place of residence and on travel from town to town. Overwhelmingly, Jews gladly welcomed these new benefits as signs that the onus traditionally attached to being a Jew was disappearing. In that respect, the educational movement known as *Judische Wissenschaft* and the liturgical innovations associated with Reform Judaism in Germany were also intended to be positive responses to the challenge of preserving distinctness of Jewish identity in the face of assimilation.<sup>4</sup>

The farsighted, however, sensed that the benefits could not be without cost. When the French National Assembly in 1792 voted Jews civil equality they did so in the form of declaring Jews free as a religion alone; no declaration was made on Jews as a nation/people. The difference was crucial. Traditionalist Jews saw no difference between religion and nation/people; for them the two were inseparable. In their eyes the separation of religion from nation/people threatened the very existence of what it meant to be a Jew. Jews could welcome civil equality as French citizens and yet worry that this very equality came at the expense of their Jewish identity. Jews would become uneasy over the implications of equality when Jews were officially no longer looked upon as a distinct nation but as a religion alone.<sup>5</sup>

Unease would grow when Bonaparte in 1806 convened the Sanhedrin, (the ancient Jewish Council sitting in modern times) to settle the issue of the relation of Jews to the state. Responding to a set of questions put to rabbinical and lay delegates, Jews swore loyalty to the state, affirmed their duties as citizens to obey laws, pay their taxes, serve in the military. Only on one issue did the rabbis hesitate: They refused to condone religious marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew: but they demonstrated their co-operativeness by agreeing not to oppose intermarriage that took place in a civil ceremony.<sup>6</sup>

*Rise of Modern Anti-Semitic Ideology*

Emancipation of western Jewry also brought to the surface a number of anti-Semitic intellectuals and writers, who sought to reverse the drive for civil equality bestowed on Jews. Some of these anti-Semites applied traditional Christian animosity to German culture by promoting the belief that Jewish equality would sap at the uniqueness and greatness of German culture. Going back at least to the time of Martin Luther, questions were raised whether Jews could ever be assimilated to German culture. Did Jews really belong to the culture of the German people or were they permanently an alien element? Among intellectual anti-Semites were luminaries of modern German culture such as Goethe, Fichte, and Wagner.<sup>7</sup>

But, as it turned out, the anti-Semitic intellectuals of Germany and France were isolated voices. Still, they were important voices filling the air breathed by thousands of Europeans decades before the rise of the Nazis. The German anti-Semites fall into two categories: Those who built on traditional church animosity towards Jews like Eugen August Rohling and Adolph Stoecker; the French counterpart to the German Christian anti-Semites was Edouard Drumont.

One of the most active race-minded anti-Semites was the journalist Wilhelm Marr, who coined the term “anti-Semitism” in his widely selling book of 1879, *The Victory of Judaism Over Germanism*. Typical was the attitude of Theodor Fritsch, who joined the Nazi party when it was formed in the 1920s. In his book, *Handbook of Anti-Semitism*, Fritsch sought to combat what was seen as the baneful affects on the German culture of Jews and Judaism. These intellectuals shared the assumption that Jews were an alien element in German culture, and that no amount of assimilation or germanization could render Jews as other than alien beings sapping at the spiritual unity of the German people.

The rise of anti-Semitic thinking among a few German intellectuals in the nineteenth century was not an isolated phenomenon. Patterns of anti-Semitic rhetoric would appear among politicians in Austria, e.g., Viennese politicians like Georg von Schornerer and Karl Lueger. Also, anti-Semitism was revived in France by French nationalistic conservatives, who thought that Jews had advanced too rapidly since emancipation. Leading these conservatives was the aforementioned Edouard Drumont whose book, *La France Juive*, published in 1886, would play a major role in creating an

anti-Semitic climate in France and would lead to the false accusations of treason against the Jewish military officer, Alfred Dreyfus. The infamous trial of Dreyfuss would further expose the deep roots of anti-Semitism in French society.<sup>8</sup>

### *Russian Anti-Semitism in Late Tsarist Russia*

In 1882, one year after Adolph Stoecker held the first International Congress of anti-Semites, Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. The assassination triggered an explosion of anti-Jewish pogroms that lasted from 1881 to the end of the monarchy in 1917. The pogroms were a turning-point in the modern history of Jew-hatred. As a consequence of anti-Jewish actions well over a million Jews emigrated out of Russia, most of them bound for the West and America, a few headed for Zion, the ancestral land of Israel, now in Ottoman-governed Palestine.

To understand the extraordinary migration that helped change the face of America, and produced the first independent Jewish state in modern times, we have to look to the autocracy and orthodoxy that lay behind the pogroms. For centuries the strongest supporter of the Tsarist absolutism was the Russian Orthodox Church, whose leadership from patriarch to priest looked to the monarchy as the guarantor of the church's privileges and power. In Russia, as nowhere else in Europe, the medieval unity of church and state was extended through the nineteenth century. The Russian church was confident of its own authority because it had never known the Reformation, never been challenged by the Enlightenment, never shaken by the French Revolution, and was never moved, until it was too late, to urge the emancipation of the peasantry.

The Russian imperial and ecclesiastical attitude towards the Jews of Russia was contemptuous. Nowhere was this better evidenced than after the establishment in 1792 of the region annexed from Poland, known as the Pale of Settlement, by Tsarina Catherine II. This vast region in the nineteenth century included all of Russian Poland, Lithuania, Belorussia, most of the Ukraine, the Crimea, and Bessarabia. These were designated areas of permitted Jewish settlement. What was not permitted to Jews was to cross the Pale and settle in Moscow and the interior of Russia, except by official permission granted to privileged Jews, mostly wealthy merchants, well-educated professionals, or men retired from the military. In the minds

of imperial officials, the aim of the Pale was to safeguard the peasantry from exploitive Jewish trading practices and to preserve the purity of orthodox Russia from the presence of unbelieving Jews. The policy was effective. At the close of the nineteenth century there were nearly five million Jews in the Pale and only 200,000 living in Russia, outside the designated area.

The Jews of Russia never experienced the legal and social benefits of emancipation known to their brethren in Western Europe. The Tsarist government, supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, had always looked on Jews exactly as German historian Treitschke had called them, "our misfortune," a burden to be patiently endured. When the imperial government ministry brought a report to Empress Elizabeth (1741–1762) recommending the settlement of Jews for the sake of their entrepreneurial skills, she was reported to have said, "From the enemies of Christ I desire neither gain nor profit."<sup>9</sup>

Jews living in the Pale of Settlement were always vulnerable to attacks, particularly on the festival days of Christmas and Easter when peasant feelings of resentment were inflamed by church sermons or when drunken Cossacks would go on rampages through a Jewish village, or through the Jewish quarter of a town. But these violent outbursts were kept at a minimum because the imperial government, mindful of the needed economic and educational skills of its Jewish minority, did not want to encourage mob violence.

The assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 changed government attitudes. The assassination was carried out by a group of anti-government revolutionaries, which counted but one Jew in their number. Yet, following the historic tendency to solve problems through scapegoats, Russians blamed Jews for the crime. Jews were collectively punished by pogroms that broke out in 200 cities and lasted for more than two decades. According to one encyclopedia account:

The pogrom in Kishniev, in April 1903, although more severe than most, was typical in many respects. For two days mobs inspired by local leaders acting with official support, killed, looted, and destroyed without hindrance from police or soldiers. When troops were finally called out and the mob dispersed, 45 Jews had been killed, nearly 600 had been wounded, and 1,500 Jewish homes had been pillaged. Those responsible for inciting the outrages were not punished.<sup>10</sup>

No evidence was found that the government acted to organize mob pogroms against Jews and their properties. But the mob was able to strike against Jews with the confidence that their actions were condoned at the highest levels of government and church.

In the wake of pogroms, the Jews began exiting Russia. They were in effect heeding the advice of Constantine Pobyedonotszev, head of the Russian Orthodox Synod and a close advisor to Tsar Alexander II. Pobyedonotszev, reacting to the baneful affect of western ideas in Russia, had urged complete russification of the country to produce one nationality, one language, one religion. But what then to do about the Jews? His answer: one third must emigrate, one third must convert and one third must be starved to death.<sup>11</sup>

### *Anti-Semitism, Race, and Genocide*

Jews who emigrated from Russia in the period of the pogroms could consider their good fortune when compared with the fate that befell Jews as a direct result of the ascendancy of Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany. Here, too, we must seek to understand the complex phenomenon of Jew-hatred.

The question before us is the connection between anti-Semitism as practiced in the West, including Tsarist Russia, and the genocidal policies carried out against Jews by Hitler and the Nazi leadership. One does not find an easy answer to this question. The reason is that the teaching of the church and the policies of the emperors most influenced by the church were never genocidal. This has been made clear by Jacob Katz in his profound studies of anti-Semitism. Whatever discriminations and restrictions the church directed against Jews it always left open the escape hatch of conversion. Traditional Christian animus was directed against the Jew as unbeliever. Only when animus was directed against the Jew not as unbeliever but as a Jew, can we speak of a sea change in anti-Semitic thinking.<sup>12</sup>

The common effort of anti-Semitic thinkers in Germany, who aimed to reverse the momentum towards the emancipation of Jewry, had largely failed. In increasing numbers Jews were being admitted to universities for the practice of law and medicine. The leaders of western European countries paid little attention to anti-Semitic thinkers, who were seen as a fringe element, whose writings and speeches appealed in a crude way to the masses.

The first efforts to form anti-Semitic parties failed. It is not that Jews were particularly liked, but there was a certain willingness to practice tolerance towards them. The same could be said of Germany during this period of time. Despite the efforts of intellectual anti-Semites, to portray Jews as an alien and pernicious element, the majority of non-Jewish Germans were willing to tolerate Jews as fellow citizens and do nothing to impede their advancement in society.

Yet, anti-Semitism became a genocidal force unique to Germany, in ways it did not in France and Russia, where longer traditions of Jew-hatred existed. How can we explain this fact? The answer lies in racism. Racism and specifically anti-Semitic racism made an impact in Germany, as nowhere else in Europe. Two authors stand out in connecting racism, anti-Semitism, and Nazism: Theodor Fritsch and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Fritsch, an accomplished anti-Semitic propagandist, joined the Nazi party when it was first formed in 1922 and died in 1933, a few months before Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. He, more than any other anti-Semite, had an influence in shaping the thinking of twentieth century German culture, including Nazi anti-Semites. His widely selling diatribe, *Handbook of Anti-Semitism*, published in 1886, went through 36 editions and reached millions. His aim in the *Handbook* was to attack the Jewish mentality and character. In rather crude terms he differentiated between degenerate and subhuman Semites and physical and mentally perfect Aryans. He maintained that Jewish mentality was represented by a corrupt Talmudic tradition. He represented rabbinism as the Achilles heel of the Jewish world; uproot rabbinism and destroy Jewish power. He went on to argue that Jews possessed the world's capital and controlled the world's press. He wrote that Jews will always constitute a foreign nation, a pariah people, who could have no place in German religious culture.<sup>13</sup>

The mention of German religious culture compelled the anti-Semites to come to terms with the figure of Jesus and the place of the Old Testament. Fritsch met the challenge by ascribing an Aryan descent to Jesus and by asserting that the spiritual element in the Old Testament could be ascribed not to Jewish religious sensibility but to Aryan; "Christian teaching arose as protest of Aryan spirit against inhumane jew-spirit;"<sup>14</sup> Here Fritsch could point to the research of Ernest Renan and Julius Wellhausen, whose writings championed the view that the New Testament was the consummation of Judaism, a religion frozen in development because of rabbinism.

Fritsch's interpretation of Christianity, and simultaneous disparagement of Judaism, set forth a racial view of the place of Jews in world history. It was a view that English Germanophile Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the "prophet of German national ascendancy," (as Katz calls him), would seek to improve. In place of Fritsch's crude differentiation between inferior Semitism and superior Aryanism, Chamberlain substituted a more complex, but equally bogus concept of racial mixing to account for what he believed to be the positive and negative moral and intellectual values in different races. In Chamberlain's theory the felicitous mixing of the races could lead to high standards of human qualities and achievements as in the Germanic peoples, but that the reverse was true of Jews who suffered from racial bastardization. Because of this theoretical bastardization Jews were found by Chamberlain to be culturally barren, morally inferior, lacking religious sensibility.<sup>15</sup>

Like those of Fritsch, the race theories of Chamberlain enjoyed a great popular success with the publication in 1899 of his book of a thousand pages, *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. The race theories of Fritsch and Chamberlain filled the cultural air of Germany during the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazi party. Hitler and his early closest associates were drawn to racist anti-Semitism because it provided a pseudo-scientific validation and justification of the Jew-hatred they shared. It is true that Hitler and the Nazi movement added nothing new to the lexicon of anti-Semitism. Their uniquely evil genius was to have politically transformed racist anti-Semitism into policies that began by socially discriminating against Jews and ended by physically exterminating them.

Why did the animus against Jews evidenced in Nazi thinking reach an unprecedented level of destruction? The answer is because the Nazis had convinced themselves that the Jews had to be destroyed because Jews were a bacterial danger to Germany and to humanity generally, a danger that had to be removed. As Katz has argued so persuasively, the image of the Jews as satanic evil was always there in medieval Christianity. It was anticipated by the actions taken against Jews by Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella during the period of the Inquisition. But exile was not genocide.

This was the ghastly new element in Jew-hatred that the Nazis added. It took the radical ideas and revolutionary energy of Nazism to translate the anti-Jewish hostility of the church into a program of genocide. How this was able to happen in Germany is a subject I will deal with in the chapters three and four.

*World's Oldest Hatred*

Looking back through centuries of anti-Semitism one cannot help but ask what explains Jew-hatred, the world's oldest hatred. In answering this question we are helped by Jacob Katz's analysis of anti-Semitism. Katz recognizes that at the heart of anti-Semitism there is an abysmal dialectic at work. To retain the ritual tradition that bestows distinctness on Jews as Jews ("Jewishness"), the Jew perforce must separate himself and herself from the non-Jew. In ancient times this "separateness" was a source of resentment, sometimes of hostility, in the eyes of non-Jews.

The coming of the Christian religion did not change this but rather added another layer of complexity in the relation of Jew and non-Jew. As Christianity found itself disagreeing with Judaism over the meaning of prophetic scriptures, hostility intensified. Yet, the possibility of ending "separateness" was always there for Jews who had "seen the light of truth" and converted to the faith of the church.

The event of legal emancipation for Jews unquestionably benefited Jews who were willing to accept the process of assimilation. But assimilation proved a deceptive process. The Jew could not so thoroughly assimilate without actually ceasing to be a Jew by conversion through baptism. Many did so; but those who did found that being an assimilated Jew did not make one any the less a target of anti-Semitic hostility. The reason was that, in the modern post-emancipation world, it was discovered that there were secular forms of the ancient and medieval negative image of the Jew. The Jew's "separateness" could now be translated into a new idiom shaped by the experiences of power, money, deceit, exploitiveness. In that respect, being Jewish acted, as Katz says, as a stimulus to which the negative response varied according to the different cultural conditions that obtained in the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds. Katz's exact words are: "Irrespective of the issue of responsibility, I regard the very presence of the unique Jewish community among the other nations as the stimulus to the animosity directed at them."<sup>16</sup>

This brief historical review of anti-Semitism reveals nothing so much as the irrational in human beings. For if, as Katz argues, being Jewish acts as a stimulus, to which there is, as there has always been, a negative response, then the dismal conclusion is: anti-Semitism exists as long as Jews exist. I think of this when I remember the incident involving Victor and



Steve described in the Prologue. For years I tried to see through Steve's eyes. What it was he saw in Victor that threatened him? I asked myself, was Steve one of those quiet at-home, late night readers of Jew-hating literature? Portland, Oregon in the 1950s, before television, was a radio town, where men turned from the evening news spoken from their Philcos, to reading pulp fiction and the *Police Gazette* magazine. Maybe they also read anti-Semitic tracts. I remember reading one myself in those days. All that I recall of it was that Franklin Delano Roosevelt and John D. Rockefeller, Sr., were both excoriated as Jews. The connection drawn with Jews, money, and power was obvious to me even then. Years later I would come to see that the model for this literature was the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a Russian forgery depicting a Jewish world conspiracy

Steve could not possibly think of Victor in connection with power and money, because Victor had none of these. What he had was this Jew-thing. For Steve that was enough. What did he think of Victor? Did he actually think of Victor at all? Steve didn't have to dislike anything about Victor. The Jew-thing was enough. I didn't understand Steve then; fifty years later I still don't. And not understanding leads me to consider the concept of the irrational. When, for whatever reason, or no reason at all, the mere fact of being a Jew stimulates hostility, do we not then confront the irrational with all its terrible power to undo our lives, all of us, Jews and non-Jews alike?

## Notes

1. Robert Chazan, "Medieval Anti-Semitism," *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*, David Berger, ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society), p. 64.
2. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction, 1700-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), chs. 3-5.
3. Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1700-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), esp. chs. XI-XII.
4. Ibid., ch. VIII.
5. Ibid., ch. IV; Katz, *From Prejudice*, op. cit., ch. 4.
6. Katz, *From Prejudice*, op. cit., ch. 8.
7. Ibid., ch. 14.
8. Ibid., ch. 24.
9. Cited in Rufus Lears, *Israel: A History of the Jewish People* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books, World Book Publishing, 1949), p. 451. See also Max L. Margolis and Alexander Marx, *A History of the Jewish People* (New York: A Temple Book, Atheneum, 1969).
10. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1967, vol. 18, p. 94.
11. Margolis & Marx, *A History of the Jewish People*, op. cit., p. 693.
12. Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, op. cit., ch. 25, esp. pp. 312-317. See also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, "Response to Rosemary Ruether," *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, Eva Fleischer, ed. (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1977), pp. 97-107.
13. Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, op. cit., pp. 303-306. See also Leon Poliakov, *The History of anti-Semitism* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1977), chs. 1, 4; George L. Mosse, *Germans and Jews* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1970), esp. ch. 4.
14. Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, op. cit., p. 306.
15. Ibid., pp. 306-311. See also George L. Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (London: J.M. Dent, 1978), esp. chs. 7, 10.
16. Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction*, op. cit., p. 322.

## Part Two

The Problem of Anti-Semitism:  
Theoretical versus Practical Solutions



*Christianity:  
A Guest in the House of Israel?*

This essay and the one following discuss the views of Clark Williamson and Rosemary Ruether, two prominent Christian theologians who believe that overcoming the enmity between church and synagogue must include new ways of thinking about what it means to be a Christian. The issue for them boils down to redefining Christian belief in order to make that belief less offensive to Jews and Judaism. Is that possible? And, is it worthy? I have my doubts.

Anyone of decency wants better Christian-Jewish relations. But can better relations come about through a new definition of Christian faith? It's a question that flies in the face of religious history and truth. Religious history informs us that Christianity evolved out of Jewish religion to acquire a distinct form of its own. That form included not only the proclamation of Messiah Jesus, but also the Christian condemnation of Jews for rejecting that proclamation in favor of their own, that of a future messianic redemption. The crucial question: Can Christians believe that Jesus is their Messiah without condemning Jews for not sharing that belief and, instead, insisting that the messianic event of the redemption is expected in the future? In other words, can Christians confess Jesus as their Christ without also condemning Jews for not making the same confession? Clark Williamson and Rosemary Ruether think Christians cannot do so without redefining their faith to accommodate Jews and Judaism. I don't agree.

From my point-of-view theological redefinition of Christian faith will bring no improvement in Jewish-Christian relations. The reason has much to do with religious truth. Christianity is a religious truth — like the truth of Judaism or Hinduism or Islam or Buddhism — that is personal and subjective. The subjectivity of religious truth respects cultural relativity. When, for example, I know that Christianity is true *for me*, I also know that my Christian truth is not a truth I can impose upon other religious people who may happen to be Jews or Hindus or Muslims. To repeat, the subjectivity of religious truth respects cultural relativity. Religious truth

also recognizes and respects Christianity as unique, meaning that it cannot be dissolved or disappear into its historic mother, Judaism.

I have come to this view from trying to understand Christianity in the context of the history of religions. This study convinces me that any effort to speak of Jewish-Christian relations — and the historical-biblical barriers that impeded those relations — is doomed to failure unless the unique religious genius of Christian faith and of Jewish faith is put forth as a starting-point of understanding.

Clark Williamson, author of *A Guest in the House of Israel* (1993), is professor of theology at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, Indiana. Clark and I were educated by the same liberal theological professors at the University of Chicago Divinity School, finishing our doctorates about the same time. Williamson's own research of the past thirty-five years turned increasingly to Judaism and to issues of Jewish-Christian relations (including the all-important matter of anti-Judaism in the New Testament). I had followed a similar research path over the same period of time, but reached different conclusions about Judaism, Christianity, and the issues affecting their long, troubled relationship.

Clark Williamson's book is important because its author seeks to convince his readers how we Christians should think about and practice our faith in relation to Jews and Judaism.<sup>1</sup> At a time when books are processed out of computers at the speed with which they are typed into them, Williamson's book, by contrast, emerged from years of scholarship and reflection.

The question raised by his book boils down to this: What must Christians believe and how should they behave after the Shoah, the Nazi destruction of European Jewry? This must be the question because Christianity was a precondition, a virtual accomplice, to the Nazi destruction of Jews. Practicing for centuries that anti-Judaic "teaching of contempt" (as Jules Isaac called it), Christianity provided the intellectual and emotional context in which Jews themselves could be treated with contempt and finally destroyed by the Nazis.

Who were the teachers of contempt? Williamson points to the New Testament Gospels, the earliest Church Fathers, the giant Protestant Reformers Luther and Calvin, major modern thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, and Adolph Harnack. The pattern of anti-Judaism seems so tightly woven into the fabric of Christian faith as to make anti-Judaism and Christianity inseparable.

What is the basic Christian theological anti-Judaic teaching of contempt? Williamson's answer is supersessionism: that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ surpassed and therefore canceled the on-going validity of the revelation of God to the Biblical people of Israel. Supersessionism, in all its variations, is seen in the church's valuation of the New Testament over the Old Testament (beginning with those very terms, "New" and "Old"). Supersessionism is conveyed by the church's sense of triumph as the newly elected people of God, a new covenant, replacing the old covenant (Israel). Supersessionism values the Hebrew Scriptures only as the prophetic preparation of the revelation of Jesus as the Christ. The teaching of contempt is forcefully conveyed in the message that Israel is judged, found guilty, and was eternally punished for rejecting her own messianic King, Jesus proclaimed the Christ (Messiah). Today, supersessionism is seen in the posture of American Protestant Evangelical Church leaders, like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, whose right-wing politics allow them to champion the State of Israel while at the same time preaching a brand of eschatological Christianity which effectively negates Judaism.

Professor Williamson's book reminds us that for centuries the Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant churches demanded and awaited Jewish conversion to Christianity. To explain the failure of Jewish conversion, church theologians spoke of a "darkness" (Augustine) that God permits to descend on the Jewish people in order to make the light of true Christian faith shine brighter. I remember hearing this language of light and darkness in 1958 from the mouth of Karl Barth (at that time the pre-eminent European Protestant theologian) at his lectures in the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel. The Jews' "darkness" was language Barth had earlier used in preparing his widely-read book, *Dogmatics in Outline*, (published in 1959).<sup>2</sup>

Clark Williamson, then a fellow graduate student, sat in Barth's Chicago lectures, and years later was to draw the title of his own book, *A Guest in the House of Israel*, from a phrase in one of Barth's many writings. But, just here, a loud dissonant note is struck for me. Hundreds of pages of Barth's theology make it abundantly clear that the revelation which gave rise to the "new covenant" means (in Barth's mind) that Christianity is vastly more than a mere "guest" in the house of Israel. Knowing this, a troubling question now occurs to me. Did Barth use this metaphor of "guest" merely for the sake of his American audience, merely for the sake of encouraging

relations of Christians and Jews in the post-Holocaust period? We must ask these questions because if one knows anything about the theology of Karl Barth, one knows that this most distinguished neo-Calvinist theologian of our time was doing nothing so much as blowing a trumpet heralding the triumph of God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ. That trumpet blast cannot but drown out any plea that Christianity is "a guest in the house of Israel." It is ironic and strange that Williamson should draw the title of his book from Karl Barth's theology, a prime example of that "supersessionism" which Williamson otherwise deplores as preventing rapprochement between Jews and Christians.

In striving to rid Christianity of anti-Judaism, Williamson shows his own distinctly Protestant spirit by returning to Jesus and Paul in the hope that in reinterpreting these pivotal personalities, he (Williamson) can correctly establish a surer foundation for Christian faith in a post-Holocaust world. The guiding principle for that reinterpretation will not be some new historical finding about Jesus or Paul but rather the event of the Holocaust itself.<sup>3</sup> As regards the Holocaust Williamson takes his stand with a dictum formulated by the Orthodox Jewish theologian, Irving Greenberg: Make no theological statement (states Greenberg) that cannot be justified in the presence of the million children burned at Auschwitz.<sup>4</sup> The burning children of Auschwitz is Williamson's stated rationale for ridding Christianity of anti-Judaism and the motivation for restating the meaning of Christianity that can avoid future genocides.

When I first read Irving Greenberg's dictum of the burning children, I found it powerful and unanswerable. I was reminded of Ivan Karamazov, (a character in Dostoevsky's late nineteenth-century novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*), who cited the tormenting of children to defend his atheism and shake the faith of his younger brother, Alyosha. My opinion is that no theological, or moral, or social, or any other "rational," statement can be defended in the presence of Auschwitz' burning children. I believe that Ivan Karamazov would have had the same opinion. The burning of children is the apocalypse of evil. I cannot be sure how Rabbi Greenberg reads all the spiritual signs of Auschwitz; but if he does not also see in them the absence of moral order, as Ivan did (and as I do) then I can't see the point of making theologically salient Auschwitz' burning children.

For me the point of the burning children is certain: As Auschwitz defeats Christianity, Auschwitz no less defeats Judaism. For Judaism, no less



than Christianity, proclaims a God-given moral order. And just as there is no theodicy that can square Auschwitz and God, there is no theodicy that can square Auschwitz with the church or with the synagogue. This is my dismal but honestly felt intuition. I presume it was roughly the same dismal but honestly felt intuition that led Albert Camus to write the novel, *The Plague*, in which Saint Augustine's theodicy of the punishing God is held up to the sight of a tormented, sick, and dying child. We should not forget that Saint Augustine's theodicy was drawn from the Deuteronomist, who would not have accepted Greenberg's dictum because he (the Deuteronomist) would have had no trouble reconciling God's justice to the burning children.

By sharp contrast, Elie Wiesel ignored the Deuteronomist when he uttered his own dismally-felt intuition that "Guilt was not invented at Auschwitz; it was disfigured there." Or, when in the novel, *Gates of the Forest*, Wiesel has concentration camp survivors putting God on trial. These, too, are intuitions of moral chaos, glimpses of the apocalypse of evil. Their implication is that if one wishes after Auschwitz to live one's life as a Jew or as a Christian with integrity-of-faith, then one must express some basis of faith that does not repeat the old patterns of contempt. That is the crucial point: integrity-of-faith. It seems to me that in writing *A Guest in the House of Israel*, Clark Williamson is engaged in a personal struggle to find a new basis for Christian integrity-of-faith.

Professor Williamson names such a great variety of Jewish views of the Messiah that no one can possibly be sure what the disciples themselves meant by proclaiming the Messiahship of Jesus. From this uncertainty the implication drawn by our author (correctly I think) is that Jesus did not directly found the religion that made him central to its messianic faith. So our question must then be: If not Jesus, who or what then founded Christianity?

Certainly no one can doubt that Christianity would not have come about and develop as it did without the teaching of Paul. Any reinterpretation of Christian faith after Auschwitz must examine Paul's letters to explain where Paul stood on the questions of Jesus' Messiahship, the law of Israel, and the grace of God. Williamson tackles these issues boldly.

Paul believed in Jesus' Messiahship, even if rarely did he use the title "Jesus Christ." Paul did not believe that the religious law based on the Torah was set aside or surpassed by faith in Jesus Christ. He argued against his fellow disciples in Jerusalem that ritual aspects of the law

(circumcision and dietary laws) need not be imposed on gentiles as a precondition for entry into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Thus, quite correctly (in my opinion) Williamson interprets Paul's quarrel with his fellow Jewish-Christians not to be a quarrel about the law *per se*, but whether gentile membership in the Jesus-fellowship required conformity to ritual demands of the law.

With respect to God's grace, Williamson insists that Romans 9:1–5 clearly shows that Paul believed that the message of God's love, graciously offered to all the Gentiles, is a message coherent with God's initial act of grace toward Israel. And thus, "Gentiles and Jews should see each others' adoption by God as confirming their own" (Williamson, p. 102), because, as Paul says, "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29, RSV) and Israel will ultimately be saved. What then, for Paul, is the purpose of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Paul's answer, says Professor Williamson, is that "through Jesus Gentiles came into relationship with the God of Israel." (Williamson, p. 103) No more than Jesus did Paul intentionally start a new religion; rather Paul calls gentiles to affirm through Jesus Christ the religion of the God of Israel.

What then of the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah? Williamson argues that Paul viewed this rejection as part of God's plan of salvation. "Through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous." (Rom 11:11, RSV) This is a "temporary hardening" of the Jewish heart until "the full number of the Gentiles has come in, 'when all Israel will be saved.'" (Rom 11:25–26. RSV) On Williamson's reading of Paul's statement in Romans, Chapters 9–11, Israel eventually will be saved, but not by the conversion of Jews to faith in Jesus Christ. Williamson agrees with those scholars who hold that Israel will be saved, not by the missionary efforts of the church, but by the "eschatological return of Christ." (Williamson, p. 106)

In Professor Williamson's interpretation of Paul, God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ deliberately established a separate track of grace for gentiles so that gentiles would not have to conform to the uncomfortable requirements of the Jewish ritual law. The Torah law, taken as a whole, is good for Jews; it is the means of responding to God's election of Israel. Here Williamson's conclusion is that Paul does not think that Jews need faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation, because eventually in the Second Coming, they will be saved.

Now, I can accept one-half of Williamson's argument: That Paul, no more than Jesus, intentionally set out to establish a new religion separate and distinct from the Judaism of that day. But a new religion did, in fact, spring from Judaism, and one is obliged to accept that fact and explain it. Williamson emphasizes Paul's mission to the Gentiles. But the singular fact of Paul's mission to the Gentiles does not itself explain the rise of the new religion.

The half of Williamson's argument I cannot accept is the ignoring of the newness of Christianity as a religion distinct from Judaism. This newness points to resurrection as not only a Jewish Pharisaical belief of the first century, but of the pagan belief in the dying-and-rising savior god, a belief widespread among adherents of the mystery religions of first century Syria and Palestine.<sup>5</sup> My point is this: It may be true that Paul did not set out to found a new religion; but it also seems true that in combining both Pharisaical and pagan modes of resurrection, Paul's thought, in effect, gave rise to a new religion — nurtured in Judaism, but also departing from it in crucial ways. Perhaps Paul did not intend this departure, but it happened because it was made inevitable by the very character of his thought.

What I cannot also accept in Williamson's account is the ignoring of Paul's universalism. Only contact with Pagan thought could account for this universalism. To repeat: Paul was influenced by the belief in the dying-and-rising savior gods of the mystery religions. Such influence explains his somewhat contradictory preaching simultaneously of the risen Lord, and the upholding of the Hebraic law. Further, we can never know what the Damascus-road experience was and why he was transformed by this experience from persecutor to the persecuted. What we do know is that the form of his thought admits of both Jewish and pagan elements. The contradictions in his thought stare out at the readers of his letters: Paul's belief in a Covenant-God, coupled with a messianic redeemer presented in the form of a dying-rising savior, and belief in the law beheld as holy, but whose ritual requirements are waived as an obstacle to non-Jews.

Professor Williamson's interpretation of Paul leaves unanswered one large question which must occur to every reader of Paul's letters. Would Paul, a self-confessed Jew, a former Pharisee and persecutor of the Jesus-followers, have converted to the Nazarenes (thereby breaking with the active religious practices of his day) merely to become a messenger of Jesus Christ to pagan gentiles? This is not an easy question to answer. I recognize

that, after his Damascus-road conversion, Paul specifically defined his apostolic mission to the Gentiles, but that did not mean he had ceased to deliver the message of Messiah Jesus also to his fellow Jews. It does not make sense to me that Paul had only gentiles in mind in preaching the new faith in Messiah Jesus. To think so (as my colleague and friend does) is to be in the good company of Krister Stendahl, Lloyd Gaston, and John Gager, scholars who also create a separate category of “Paul’s mission to the Gentiles,” a category untouched and unaffected by the Orthodox Pharisaical Judaism to which Paul belonged.

To take this position is, in effect, to minimize Paul’s Damascus-road conversion or to disregard it altogether. It is also to say that Paul’s quarrel with his fellow Jews was not a quarrel, but a mere disagreement over the status of the law and the ritual implications of faith in Jesus Christ for gentiles. Lastly, it is to deny to Paul his vision of the universal implications of faith in Jesus Christ, beginning with his vision of the place of gentiles in the economy of God’s grace.

In my view Paul’s dispute over the status of the ritual law in relation to faith in Jesus Christ contained the seed of a universal religious vision. Granted that this is not what Paul intended, but this is what occurred. Our question is to ask how and why it occurred. I will come back to this point.

To extend my disagreement with Clark Williamson I would argue that Paul’s mission to the Gentiles was born of his frustration with the failure of his own fellow-Jews to adopt faith in Jesus Christ. Similarly, the failure of his Jewish-Christian colleagues to see that faith in Jesus Christ could not be tied to ritual requirements was condemned by Paul as boasting in a religious pedigree. The Letters to the Galatians and to the Romans (as I interpret them) show that Paul viewed the new faith in Jesus as a universal faith; and he also viewed the Jerusalem-based Jewish adherents of the Jesus-faith as limiting and obstructing that universalism.

I believe it is true, as Williamson asserts, that Paul did not set out to establish a separate religion; but the outstanding fact for me is that a separate religion was seeded by Paul’s missionary activities, through the message of a universal faith in Jesus Christ voiced in his letters. This “separate religion” may not have been what Paul intended, but it seems to have been an inevitable development given Paul’s central insight: That faith in Jesus Christ could not be national or cultic but only universal and non-cultic.

Considering how closely Dr. Williamson wishes to connect both Jesus and Paul to their Jewish origins, I turned to his chapter on Christology with expectation and wonder. Williamson begins by endorsing the “proleptic Christology” of Rosemary Ruether, “who places the eschatological hope ahead of both Jews and Christians, who in common wait for it...”<sup>6</sup> (Williamson, p. 167) He rejects the classical Christology of Athanasius and modern Liberation Christologies for setting Jesus against Judaism. He will have nothing to do with those Christologies, stemming from Adolph Harnack, which discover the meaning of Christhood through an empirical-historical isolation of Jesus’ uniqueness. Christology is not Jesusology, Williamson tells us. But, then my question to him is, what is Christology? His answer is in fact the refrain of his book, “Jesus Christ is a gift to the church of the God of Israel, so is he also a gift from the Israel of God.” (Williamson, p. 188)

How are we to understand this gift? How are we as Christians to benefit by it? Is there any benefit in this gift for Jews? And, what penalty, if any, is there for refusing the gift?

Williamson does not answer any of these questions directly. In place of answers we get a strategy of Protestant liberal theology: to collapse the meaning of Christian faith into the value category of love. The Christhood of Jesus is equated with the norm of love. Jesus disclosed “the love of God graciously offered to each and all and the dual command of God that we love God with all our selves and our neighbors as ourselves.” (Williamson, p. 190) The connection of this norm to the God of Israel is crucial. For Williamson states: “If we interpret Jesus Christ in the light of this norm [love of God and neighbor], we will understand his significance not in relation to himself alone but in relation to the God of Israel whose promise and command he discloses to you.” (Williamson, p. 190)

What are the “promise and command” of Israel’s God disclosed by Jesus? The answer to that question (if I had it) would seem to me to be more properly the beginning of a Christology. Further, if I had a satisfactory answer to that question, would that answer render the person of Jesus uniquely the Christ? And, further yet, would that answer not stand in contradiction to Williamson’s own strictures against the historical-empirical investigation of Jesus’ uniqueness?

Without an answer to my question about God’s “promise and command,” I’m not sure how the norm of love makes Jesus the Christ. The

norm of love was there in the faith of Israel before Jesus was proclaimed the Christ. One hardly sees what the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ adds to the norm of love, save for the Crucifixion of Jesus as the image of redemption through suffering love (which image could also be the beginning of a new Christology).

Then there is this question: If Jesus, as Clark Williamson suggests, is continually pointing away from himself to the “promise and command” of God, does this not diminish the very meaning of Christhood as divine authority. The Gospels portray Jesus as more than a prophet, more than teacher or rabbi of the law. Was it not the perception of divine authority that caused the disciples to call Jesus (afterwards, if not in his lifetime) the Christ? And, if the answer is yes, then in pointing to the “promise and command” of God, was Jesus not also pointing to himself? At least Paul and the Gospel writers seemed to have thought so. If what Professor Williamson says is true of Jesus and Paul, then it is not only the development of Christianity as a religion separate and distinct from Judaism that needs to be explained? There is also the self-identity of Christianity itself as a religion. Since Christianity developed as a distinct religion, the characteristics of that distinctness, including its anti-Judaism, also need to be explained.

In bringing Christianity back to its Jewish roots, Williamson relies on some of the finest scholars writing today. But what these scholars do not tell us is why Jesus should have inspired a personal fellowship that would in turn inspire messianic proclamations about him. And, why Paul was so moved by the knowledge of Jesus’ activities (as preached by his followers) that he joined the fellowship and took the message of Jesus the Christ across the seas. There is powerful and abiding mystery in those two facts. There are also haunting questions about the unique power of the earliest Christianity that have not yet been answered by scholarly investigation of the Jewish roots of Christianity. What of the pagan religious influence on Paul’s thought in shaping his belief about Jesus’ Messiahship? Unfortunately, too little has been made of this.

At some point, rather early in development, Christianity ceased to be a branch of Judaism and took its own shape as a tree itself. While we cannot be exactly certain how this happened, we can be fairly sure that the all-important matter of ritual change in the late first or early second centuries (baptism, Sabbath, as well as the confession, “Jesus is Lord,”) helped

produce a change in religious consciousness and thereby accounts for the appearance of a new tree.

My final comment is on the distinction between theology and religion. Like Clark Williamson, I labored in the vineyards of the University of Chicago Divinity School where we learned to make the sweet wine of theology. What we were not much taught is what to make of the bitter grapes of religion. Both Judaism and Christianity are bitter grapes: sectarian, demanding, exclusive, messages of hope mixed with terrible judgment. If ridding Christianity of anti-Judaism were only a question of theologically redefining the meaning of Christian doctrine to render it acceptable to Judaism and Jews, then Williamson's *A Guest in the House of Israel* gives us valuable guidelines.

But anti-Judaism is embedded in Christian self-identity as deeply as anti-idolatry is embedded in Judaism, and as anti-Judaism and anti-Christianity are embedded in Islam. Supersessionism is in all three Monotheistic religions. But also present in each of the three is a restless energy to achieve and sustain self-identity or uniqueness as a religion. This is seen in these struggles: Hebraic scriptural obsession with the *baalim* and forbidden worship at the "high places;" Paul's preoccupation with the defining requirement of ritual circumcision and the gospel writers' resentment of Jewish rejection of Jesus; Muhammad's wounded pride at the rejection of his apostolic authority by both priests and rabbis. These struggles to define one's self religiously occurred in a context of rejecting something or someone precisely in order to be one's self and to represent something.

However close they may have been in their beginnings, the religions of Judaism and Christianity developed differently and, in time, became two different religions. It is not easy to state that difference. But, if at the gate of heaven St. Peter were to confront me with that question of difference, I would say that whereas Judaism is a religion of communal belonging, Christianity is a religion of personal salvation. Judaism was through history what it essentially was from the beginning — a religion of one nation-people. Christianity, mainly because of Paul, became a religion of many nation-peoples, as did Islam. The causes of difference are power and proselytizing, and the lack of them. Judaism was for brief spells during the David-Solomonic, Hasmonean, and Hellenistic periods a proselytizing religion; but Judaism's proselytization ended when power ended. Power and proselytization did not end for Christianity, or for Islam.

For me it is interesting, worthy of study, but ultimately inconsequential that Christianity originated in Judaism. What *is* important is not the origins but the development of both Judaism and Christianity. It was deplorable but inevitable that *adversus Judaeos* would become part of Christian thinking. But it was also deplorable and inevitable that Rabbinic Judaism through history should view Christianity as an illegitimate claimant to divine revelation.

The last point brings me to a delicate question. If Christianity is meant to be “a guest in the house of Israel,” is that guest welcomed by Israel? I have no doubt that Jews of the Reform tradition and perhaps of the Conservative tradition will read Clark Williamson’s book with interest and appreciation. But I doubt the same interest and activity in Orthodox Jews. Nor would traditionalist Christians — Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant — accept the status of being merely “a guest in the House of Israel.” The reason, as I mentioned earlier, is religious self-identity that is both exclusionary and triumphalist for Orthodox Jews, no less than for traditionalist Christians.

The author of *A Guest in the House of Israel* is a liberal Protestant, who has written a theology of the rational good, which seeks to return Christian witness to its original, ethical roots in Judaism, of a type. I say “of a type,” because the Judaism that is to guide Christianity’s future is not the Judaism of the Deuteronomist or the Priestly writer, but the Judaism of universal love, peace, and justice rising out of Micah, Second Isaiah, and other prophetic writers. Here one finds a wonderful vision, born of theological reflection. But, this is not the vision of religion.

Religion, as I said, is a bitter grape, nourishing as it embitters, rendering large things small, insulated, isolated. Religion renders the universal vision of the One God sectarian, parochial, and divisive. Religion is not ethics. Religion is communal and cultic and sacrificial; religion is forgiving and unforgiving; religion is closed and secure, not open and insecure; religion is both informed and ignorant. My own personal experience tells me that traditionalist Christians know the Hebrew Bible but remain ignorant of Judaism and Jewish history; while Orthodox Jews know nothing of the New Testament or Church history, save for their anti-Judaism/anti-Semitism.

If, in my judgment, there is no religious bridge connecting Judaism and Christianity, there are nevertheless a number of theological underpasses taking one to the neighbor’s house. In this world of volatile and dangerous change it is a matter of urgency that Christians and Jewish traditionalists



visit each other's houses across the street, talk with the neighbor, get to know each other, appreciate the differences, and in doing so contemplate why God in his infinite wisdom made them neighbors to inhabit the same earth. I hope the reading of Clark Williamson's theological book makes this possible.

Acquaintance, mutual understanding may not be enough to prevent a future Holocaust; but, then, I don't believe that the past Holocaust was caused by the religion or theology of Christianity, or even by its anti-Judaism. Perhaps a good case could be made demonstrating that Christian anti-Judaism was a pre-condition of the Holocaust, but it was hardly a sufficient condition. Hitler murdered Jews as Jews, racially, irrespective of any religious or theological categories. My reading of the history books tells me that the Holocaust was caused by the uniquely historical combination of modern Nazi racism and German nationalism, and by massive world indifference to the appearance of that phenomenon.

Visiting one's neighbor's house may not be enough to prevent a future Holocaust, but it could reduce that ordinary, daily contempt that Christians and Jews feel for each other, particularly when it is sustained by ignorance.

## Notes

1. Clark Williamson, *Guest in the House of Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1993).
2. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).
3. Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, William F. Stinespring, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1946), p. 421.
4. Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust," *Auschwitz: Beginning of A New Era?*, Eva Fleischer, ed. (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. 7–56.
5. Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul*, op. cit., see for a telling account of the influence on Paul of Hellenistic pagan mystery religions.
6. Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).

*Jews Be Damned:  
Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic?*

Clark Williamson dealt with Christian anti-Judaism by identifying Christianity as a “guest” in the house of Israel. Rosemary Ruether in her book, *Faith and Fratricide: the Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism*, goes Williamson one better by rendering Christianity a penitent monk, begging admission to Israel’s house. This image is accomplished by repeating a slogan: “Is anti-Semitism the left hand of Christology?” In other words is anti-Semitism an inherent part of Christology so that one cannot confess one’s faith in Jesus Christ without also saying, “Jews be damned.”<sup>1</sup>

Apart from Ruether’s treatment of anti-Semitism in Christian writings, the authentic accomplishment of her book is that it asks openly what many Christians and Jews have pondered silently in their hearts: Can Christianity exist in its own right without having to repudiate Jews and Judaism? A painful question. It is sobering to learn from the C.Y. Glock and R. Stark sociological study (“Christian Beliefs and Anti-Semitism,” 1966) that while Roman Catholic officials lifted from the head of the Jewish people the ancient charge of deicide, it was an action that had little effect on large numbers of American Catholics who continue to believe the Jewish people guilty of the murder of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

This should not surprise anyone. Official doctrines of churches seldom influence the consciousness of their faithful adherents. Church hierarchy may want to lead Catholics in progressive thinking about Jews and Judaism, but it is wrong to assume that they are following. For that reason Rosemary Ruether’s book deserves a careful scrutiny. In contending that the nerve of anti-Semitism is located in the very essence of the Christian’s confession of Jesus Christ, she has challenged every Christian believer. What we wish to pursue here is how soundly the author has argued her case.

Ruether correctly says that the “crucial experience that generated the Church’s Christology” was “the crucifixion itself” (Ruether, p. 65). Some 2,000 years after the event the outstanding questions remain: How should the event of crucifixion be understood, and who was responsible for it? To

answer these questions I quote my colleague and collaborator, New Testament Scholar Roy Bowen Ward, who has written, “In terms of the developing [Gospel] passion narrative, Ruether is certainly correct that there were Christians who searched the scriptures and developed a *midrash* which eventually was anti-Judaic in character.”<sup>3</sup> As was made clear from the first chapter, this anti-Judaic *midrash* was present in all the canonical Gospels’ accounts of Jesus. But, let us also remind ourselves that these Gospel accounts were not the earliest writings to appear in the New Testament. Paul’s writings came before the Gospels. And Paul’s Christology, by contrast with the Gospels, does not seem to necessitate an anti-Judaic negative side, as Ruether claims.

The most anti-Judaic text in the Pauline letters Ruether quotes from is 1 Thessalonians 2:14 015016 (RSV):

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved — so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God’s wrath has come upon them at last!

But, as Ward asks, is the passage actually from Paul, or is it a later interpolation as Birger Pearson has argued? Pearson contends that this passage is “manifestly foreign to Paul’s theology.” with reference to the Jews.<sup>4</sup>

After carefully considering the evidence, Ward concludes that when we consider Paul’s statement about Jews and Judaism in Romans, Chapters 9–11, one of his authentic and most influential letters, there is even less reason to conclude as stridently as Ruether does that Christology entails the rejection of Jews and Judaism. As we have shown in the first chapter, Paul says in Romans, Chapter 9, God has not abandoned his ancient covenant people. Further, he believes that ultimately “all Israel will be saved.” (Rom 11:26, RSV) As Ward notes, it is true that Paul regards the Jews as “not enlightened” concerning the righteousness that has been revealed in Christ (Rom 10:2–3, RSV), but this does not lead Paul to the conclusion that God has rejected the Jews. Ward writes:

On the contrary, Paul expressly denies that God has rejected his people, the Jews (Rom 11:11), and unequivocally affirms that ‘the

gifts and the call of God are irrevocable' (Rom 11:29). This view of Paul is in sharp contrast with the view taken, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew where the 'sons of the kingdom' are really and finally rejected.<sup>6</sup>

Ward ends his argument with a critical comment.

It is difficult to understand how Ruether can conclude that 'Judaism for Paul is not only *not* an ongoing covenant of salvation where men continue to be related in true worship of God: it never was such a community of faith and grace' (Ruether, p. 104). It is only Gentiles, not Jews, whom Paul characterized as those who 'new not God.' Paul himself boasts of his Jewishness and can even say that 'as to righteousness under the law [he was] blameless' (Phil 3:6). He never says that Judaism was a false worship of God; rather, he claims that a new righteousness has been revealed (Rom 1:17; 3:21; 10:3) which causes him to move into a new phase in the history of salvation. Nor does his acceptance of the gospel lead him to deny the holiness of the law (Rom 7:12) nor the election of the Jews (Rom 11:28). It is difficult to see how Paul is any more anti-Judaic than other Jewish sectarians such as those at Qumran, who like Paul, believed that God was doing a new thing in the history of salvation. Unlike the Qumran sectarians who expected the destruction of 'Mainstream' Jews (whom the sectarians considered apostate), Paul hoped for/expected the salvation of all Israel (Rom 11:26).<sup>7</sup>

The case for anti-Judaism cannot easily be made against Paul, whose authentic letter preceded the canonical gospels. With greater certainty anti-Judaism can be found in the Gospels from Mark to John. But any serious attention to historical circumstances that lie behind these writings demonstrates that the anti-Judaic themes present are due not to their Christological confession, but to the situation faced by Jews at the time of the war with Rome which commenced in the year 70 CE

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the final break between the church and the synagogue has taken place and the relations between Jews and Christians had become acutely political. The Jews were a defeated enemy of Rome, and the Christians, not tainted with that defeat, sought to be dissociated from the Jews and to appear favorable in Roman eyes.

Probably the only Christian writing which remains from the pre-70 CE period are the letters of Paul. Paul never attributed the death of Jesus to the Jews, but after 70 CE this charge appears and develops rapidly. The effect, apparent already in Luke and Acts of the Apostles, is to show that Jesus was not so much an enemy of Rome but one whom the Jews plotted against. By the time of the second century apocryphal Gospel of Peter, the story of Jesus' crucifixion is told in such a way that the Roman Pontius Pilate leaves the scene and it is the Jews who proceed with the crucifixion. This, says Ward, is clearly an apologetic development intended to absolve Jesus from the charge of being an enemy of Rome. Jews alone appear as the trouble-makers, enemies of both Romans and Christians.

Ruether rightly says that "the foundations of anti-Judaic thought were laid in the New Testament;" it is no less true that hostility towards Jews and Jewish religion in the Greco-Roman world antedated Christianity. The evidence shows that Christian anti-Judaism in part was a historical development out of the earlier pagan hostility. Salo Baron states that "almost every note in the cacophony of medieval and modern anti-Semitism was sounded by the chorus of ancient writers."<sup>8</sup> This is not to deny a distinctive or unique Christian *theological* factor in the church's anti-Judaic polemic; but it is to call into question Ruether's thesis that "Christian anti-Judaism grew from a quite separate and distinct motivation [than the pagan], rooted in the inter-religious antagonism between Judaism and Christianity over the Messiahship of Jesus" (Ruether, p. 30).

While (as seen in Chapter One) the background of the antagonism between Jews and non-Jews in the pagan world is complicated, two facts stand out: (1) the resistance of many Jews to assimilate wholly within the Hellenistic culture, favoring instead their own distinctive social and religious forms, which, in turn, rendered them vulnerable to pagan accusations about pride, privilege and success; (2) the resentment of the pagans of the success with which Jews converted non-Jews to their own religious outlook.

The Jews' "separatism" was both religiously necessary and a provocation resented by pagan non-Jews. Catholic historian Edward Flannery writes:

Unlike the rest of their Greco-Oriental and, later, Roman neighbors, Jews did not take their place as average citizens of the cities

and towns. They continued to acknowledge Jerusalem as the Holy City to which they sent a *didrachma* every year as a personal tax and where stood the Temple of Yahweh, their one true God, invisible and transcendent, who refused to assume His place in the pantheons of the empire. Looking upon their host countries as profane soil and their fellow citizens as children of error and superstition, Jews grouped themselves in a quarter of the city all their own. The “ghetto” was a voluntary reality hundreds of years before the term was coined or legislation regarding it enacted. To the proud heirs of Pericles, Aristotle and Homer, this aloofness was an insufferable arrogance. Convinced that all that was not Greek was barbarian, they naturally resented rival claims to superiority or privilege on the part of a people they considered politically and culturally undistinguished. A collision between these two proud and dissimilar mentalities could only be a matter of time.<sup>9</sup>

Further, the vigorous apologetic and successful proselytizing actions aimed at Gentiles by Jewish religious and intellectual leaders for several hundred years (well into the Christian era), following the victorious Maccabean War, pitted Jews against rival pagan missionaries, and later against the Christian evangelical mission. Again Flannery:

... as the last pre-Christian century approached, the position of the Jews little resembled what it had been a century or more before. Then a small, clannish people, they were now representatives of an influential and proselytizing nation that threatened to rival the best efforts of Greek civilization in spiritual influence and commercial enterprise...Hellas accepted the challenge with bad grace. In the cities where Jews were numerous, open hostilities commenced.<sup>10</sup>

The literary attacks on Jewish beliefs and rituals that developed in this period, initially by Greek intellectuals and later by Romans, were motivated by resentment of both Jewish separatism and proselytization. The widening influence of Jewish religious and philosophical ideas among the pagan educated following the Jewish victory in the Maccabean War proved a threat to many Roman thinkers, as witnessed by Seneca’s defensive reaction (already quoted) against Jews who “have so prevailed that they are accepted everywhere in the world: the conquered have given their laws to the conquerors.”<sup>11</sup>

As we saw, pagan writers condemned Jews for misanthropy and aloofness; atheism or hatred of the gods; the superstitious practice of abstaining from pork; the absurd rituals of circumcision and animal sacrifice; laziness in observing Sabbath worship; ritual murder; disobeying the moral and rational laws of the universe. Many of the same charges were hurled against Christians because of their own separatist and proselytizing ways. This pagan *adversos Judaeos* tradition provided the "original capital," as Flannery puts it, on which the church thinkers later generously drew. Pagan philosophical antipathy to Jewish religion did not create the antagonism between Jew and non-Jew in the ancient world, but rather confirmed it, providing a kind of intellectual rationale for popular resentment against the political power and social status, as well as religious influence, of Jews.

It is disappointing that Ruether acknowledges pagan hostility to Jews and Judaism as a source for Christian anti-Judaism, but, without explanation, rejects it as a valid perspective for understanding later developments. She speaks of tolerant Romans "who found formulae of special accommodation of Jewish ways within the Greco-Roman society," and intolerant Christians who "repealed this protected status of the Jews and began to create the legal instruments of the ghetto." But she inexplicably concludes, "This fact alone must lead us to question the thesis that it was pagan anti-Semitism, wrongly assimilated by Christians, that resulted in the embitterment of relations between Christians and Jews in Christendom. Historically, the relation is somewhat the reverse" (Ruether p. 28). If, as suggested, pagan resentment against Jewish separatism helps explain the antagonism between the two peoples, then surely the principle of the ghetto in the dynamic of separation-isolation-ostracism-oppression was operative several hundred years before the triumph of the church over both pagans and Jews in the fourth century, a triumph that made the later, medieval ghetto possible.

The drift of Ruether's analysis of pagan hostility to Judaism suggests that she seems to fear minimizing Christian hostility. That explaining anti-Judaism by referring to its pagan antecedents will obscure what was unique in the church's contempt, thereby minimizing Christianity's culpability for anti-Semitism. It is, however, a groundless fear if continuity and discontinuity in the historical explanation of anti-Judaism are kept in mind. The evidence shows that the Christian-Jewish competition for converts in the first three centuries of the Common Era continued a pattern of rivalry already set forth in Jewish-Pagan antagonisms over the matter of proselytization.



The Christian-Jewish competition proved to be more heated, more combative than its forerunner because, as Ruether herself notes, Christians, being theologically closer to Jews than to any other religious people, had greater reason to assert their independence of the older tradition. The anti-Judaic polemic which develops at the beginning of the second century has its root in this exercise of independence.

Unquestionably the new element in the developing polemic against Judaism was the charge that God punishes the Jew on earth and in heaven for murdering Jesus Christ. As we saw in the first chapter, the charge of deicide was first expressed in the second century by Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho*), later repeated by Hippolytus and Origen. Then the charge was turned into a battle-ax against the Jews by John Chrysostom in his fierce sermons at Antioch at the close of the third-century. Chrysostom speaks of the “odious assassination” of Christ by the Jews, of whom there is no “expiation possible, no indulgence, no pardon.”

The charge of the divine punishment of the Jews for the murder of Christ was the theological turning-point in the Christian-Jewish antagonism. It signals the later, more destructive stage of the church’s mission: not merely to refute the theological claims of the synagogue, but to drive-out and punish all those who resist the message of Jesus Christ and continue to practice Jewish religion. Moreover, the charge of deicide theologically justified and thereby compounded the misfortunes Jews were increasingly experiencing prior to the advent of Christianization of the Roman Empire in 381. Perhaps the movement *from* the church’s effort to distinguish itself from the synagogue *to* the Christian’s condemnation of Jews themselves was inevitable given (as we noted earlier) the worsening political relations between Christians and Jews in the post-70 CE Roman period. The “seed of contempt” planted in the later first century took root during two hundred years of church-synagogue rivalry and came to poisonous flower during the fourth century when the essentially anti-Judaic view that the Jewish people are forever cursed by God for their crime of deicide was widely propagated.

As I see it, neither the early anti-Judaic polemic, nor its later anti-Semitic turn, as Ruether contends, appears to be in this three hundred years’ development, some sort of necessary, negative translation of the church’s confession of the Messiahship of Jesus. What we discern in the evidence is that with the deicide charge the church introduced a new, more potent

weapon in its ongoing, increasingly competitive struggle with the synagogue. It is the historical or political context of church-synagogue relations which really accounts for the devolution of Christian anti-Judaism into anti-Semitism, not some fateful, inner logic of Christology itself, as Professor Ruether contends.

With the rapid Christianization of the empire, anti-Judaism was converted into a sword against Jewish communities from the fourth century on. Ruether provides a competent and clear outline of the *adversos Judaeos* tradition as it developed in the thinking of the church fathers, tracing the way in which anti-Judaism became both impetus and rationale for the progressive ostracism and condemnation of the Jew in western society.

In the final pages Ruether seeks to make her own original contribution to ending the *adversos Judaeos* tradition when she asks, "Is it possible to say 'Jesus is Messiah' without implicitly or explicitly saying at the same time 'and Jews be damned?'" (Ruether p. 246) She poses a crucial question for a new theological dialogue between Judaism and Christianity. In briefest outline, Ruether's position is:

1. The church's confession "Jesus is Messiah" was directed against Jews and the ongoing validity of their faith, when the Messiahship of Jesus was interpreted to mean that the world exists under a new dispensation, in relation to which all that God revealed to the creation *before* the appearance of Jesus Christ, as attested by Hebrew scriptures, is judged to be "old" and "promise," surpassed by what is now believed to be "new" and "fulfillment."
2. The anti-Judaic root of Christianity cannot be torn out until the church's Christology is rid of its negation of the ongoing validity of Jewish faith.
3. The meaning of "Jesus is Messiah" must be reinterpreted in such a way as to shift the stress *from* the present salvation of the world in Christ, *to* Christ's prophecy of God's own future victory over evil in the world.
4. A Christianity based not on faith in salvation presently accomplished in Christ, but on hope in God's future moral victory, wherein the controlling meaning of "Christ" shifts from redemption to prophecy. With such a theological reformulation Christianity is divested of its imperialistic tendency to view its own theological message as absolute and the message of other religions, including that of Judaism, as relative.

Points 1 and 2 repeat the supersession of Christian theology and need to be eliminated if Christianity is to claim integrity-of-faith. Integrity-of-faith we remember is at the heart of Clark Williamson's own formulation of a Christianity without anti-Judaism. Points 3 and 4, however, are not contributions to Christian integrity-of-faith but formulations that undermine the meaning of Christian faith. This needs explanation.

Since the antagonism of church against synagogue in the Hellenistic-Roman era has its cause primarily in historical/political events, only secondarily within theological ideas, and since anti-Judaic ideas are seen to be more "expression" than "cause" of the antagonism, then, indeed, we should challenge the soundness of Ruether's constructive proposals, listed above. If the anti-Judaic root of Christianity is considerably deeper and more complicated than the theological expressions of anti-Judaism, a theological reinterpretation of the meaning of Jesus Christ will hardly uproot anti-Judaism. One can well agree with our author that Christian thinking should rid itself of that triumphalism wherein the message of the divine promise of human fulfillment in Jesus Christ is made a basis for derogating Hebrew scripture, Jewish religion, and the Jewish people. But does this call for a doctrinal or intellectual change in the traditional Christian confession of faith; or rather does it call for a practical or institutional change in the uses (or misuses) to which Christians have put their confession of faith? Most people, including our author, will say both. But there is a difference of strategy here that involves a central difference in understanding what the Christian Christological confession means.

Ruether's proposal is that Christians abandon a teaching about salvation wherein Judaism is negated. And there should be no difficulty in doing this if Christians cease believing in their redemption in Christ as an accomplished fact, and begin to view it as an event to be expected in the future, in that time when all mankind, Christian and non-Christian, Jew and Gentile, will be delivered from evil. When the accent mark of Christian theology falls not on what has taken place, but on what will take place then there will be little reason for Christians to continue pridefully to assert the absolute truth of their revelation.

I must respond here that the distinctive character of Christianity is given to it by an irreducible message conveyed through the manifold symbols of its different liturgical, intellectual and institutional traditions. There always have been, and always will be, differences in interpreting this

message; but there is also an abiding continuity to the various expressions of Christian faith, inhering in the belief that the actions of God — Creation, Redemption and Coming Kingdom — are united in and therefore understood by, the grace of God, grace made available *at every present moment* through faith in Jesus Christ. The theology of the church from the writing of Paul to the major systematic thinkers of the present-day have interpreted the past, present and future actions of God to be intimately related to the belief in God's self-incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ. When Ruether seeks to separate these actions in order to make the meaning of Christ's Messiahship depend not on events of the past and present, but on events expected in the future, we may wish to ask if she has not so distanced herself from the historic content of Christian belief that what she defends as "Christological" would not prove intelligible, much less acceptable, to any of the recognizable branches of Christianity?

However, Ruether's argument for redefining Christology from present salvation to future victory is presented not so much as an insight into Christian faith, but more as a way of *accommodating* one of the essential teachings of Judaism, namely, that the Messiah will not appear until evil is conquered in the world. Thus, the unfortunate appearance given by her argument is that by a mere change in theological doctrine or in official Church teaching, the *adversos Judaeos* can be overcome, thus ending the ancient hostility between church and synagogue. Here our author can be accused of overestimating the power of ideas in shaping common piety.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was not the first scholar to have perceived the essential relationship between religious experience and religious ideas, but he was one of the most influential, at least with regard to Christianity. Schleiermacher argued that doctrines do not lead, but rather follow the minds and hearts of the faithful.<sup>12</sup> The Christian doctrine of salvation symbolizes intellectually the deepest feelings of countless human beings about life and death, grace and judgment, sin, love and redemption. To suppose, as Ruether does, that the fundamental meaning of Christology can be changed from present grace to future prophecy flies in the face of centuries of common Christian experience. The implication of our author's Christological "reinterpretation," is that in order for Christology to cease being anti-Semitic, it must cease being historically recognizable as Christology, that is, "salvific." To us this appears self-defeating — a case of stopping the disease by shooting the patient.

Saint Paul expresses dialectic between the present reality of “justification” and the future “salvation,” which seems to have influenced Ruether’s own Christological formulation stressing future redemption. But the important point is that for Paul, justification and salvation, present and future, are connected, one depends on the other for its meaning. This is not clearly the case in Ruether’s argument. Actually, she reverses Paul’s connection. Where Paul understood the certainty of future salvation to derive from the knowledge of God’s present justifying grace (Rom 5:11), Ruether vigorously affirms God’s future moral victory over evil in the world, and then alludes vaguely to the revelation of salvation in Christ as “paradigmatic” of this victory, leaving it wholly unclear what is or should be the relation for Christian faith in these two events (Ruether p. 249).

Further, our author is naive in supposing that anti-Judaism can be rooted out by the mechanical act of theologically redefining the doctrine of Christ. I say “mechanical” because Ruether wants to state a doctrine of Jesus’ Christhood that avoids both Christian exclusivity and absolutism. Her chosen way is to give Christology a Jewish form, to press the meaning of Jesus Christ into a Jewish messianic mold, by stressing future over present, prophecy over salvation, God’s expected moral victory in the world over the present state of the world’s evil. But to do this she must not only ignore 2,000 years of Christian theological development, she must also ignore the historical question of how Christianity arose out of its Jewish matrix to become its own unique religion, independent of Judaism.

Ruether’s indifference to Christian history is further suggested by the way in which she seeks to reach behind the 2,000 year-old development of the church and its theology, to confront somebody she refers to as “a historical Jesus” who was “a faithful Jew within the Mosaic covenant.” She writes:

The idea that the final messianic Advent has already happened in Jesus must be reformulated through an empathetic encounter with the way this idea originally arose in its Jewish context. Here we discover a historical Jesus as a faithful Jew within the Mosaic covenant, who did not set out to replace Judaism by another religion, but who lived in lively expectation of the coming of God’s Kingdom and judged his society in its light. The expectation drove him to Jerusalem and to his death at the hands of hostile Roman and Jewish collaborationist officials. (Ruether p. 249)

It is moot whether or not Jesus “set out to replace Judaism by another religion”; the vastly more important fact is that a new religion arose from the activity of Jesus and his followers. It may be true that in some ways the historical development of the church, especially in its later attitudes towards Jewish religion, represents a betrayal of the original spirit of Jesus’ ministry, but we have no exact knowledge of that ministry, and little reason to suppose that we can establish an original “Jewish Jesus,” in relation to which we can discern and evaluate the later Christological formulations of the church. Further, if Ruether wants to say that Jesus was a “faithful Jew within the Mosaic covenant,” one would then want to ask her how this “faithful Jew” is related to the Synoptic Gospels’ portrait of the dissident, “law-breaking” Jew, who provoked Jewish religious officials, and brought down on his head the Roman civil authority in Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> The absence of such an analysis focuses attention on the peculiar phrase “empathetic encounter,” which in Ruether appears to be rhetoric posing as method of historical interpretation. We may indeed want to exercise “empathy” in seeking to discern the figure of Jesus in the Jewish context of his life and teaching; but exercise all the “empathy” we will, the challenge and burden of interpretation returns us again and again to the literature of early Christianity, hence to the witness of the church. One need hardly remind our author of the well-known fact that the life and death of Jesus received barely a notice in the development of Jewish religion after the first century.

The questionable argument that there is an original Jewish form of Christianity tied to a recoverable Jewish Jesus is of a piece with the no less questionable tendency to treat Christianity and Judaism as siblings. The enmity of Christianity for Judaism is expressed as “fratricidal,” the younger brother’s murderous resentment of his dependence on the older, more mature brother. The fratricidal impulse of Christianity can only be eliminated (Ruether contends) with the return of Christianity to original unity with Judaism based on the Jewish Jesus. But here our author surely confronts a difficulty from the other, Jewish side of the issue. In tying Christianity fraternally to Judaism, she, in effect, ties Judaism theologically to Christianity — and this from a Jewish point of view is plainly unacceptable. If it is true that Christianity is born of Judaism and can never express itself without revealing its parentage, it remains no less true that Judaism disavowed its child historically and theologically and could hardly be expected

to define its own genius in relation to an illegitimate offspring. For what is principally at stake here (as we saw in the previous chapter) is the meaning and value of religious self-identity, Jewish no less than Christian.

Samuel Sandmel in his brief, lucid study, *We Jews and Jesus* (1965), argues that there is nothing in the historical figure of Jesus or in his teachings that would in any way warrant Jewish belief in Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>14</sup> The belief in the Messiahship of Jesus, he says, is a creation of the Church's confession, precisely the confession that separates church from synagogue. Christians participate in an integral vision which (granted its Jewish antecedents) does, in fact, theologically separate them from Judaism. Moreover, Christians should not suppose that the inherent contradiction between the church's claim about Jesus Christ and the classical Jewish teaching about the Messiah can be overcome without either Christians quitting their faith in favor of Judaism or Jews converting to Christianity.

Ruether presses her argument that though Judaism rejects the church's Christology, at least it does not reject Christians. Here she refers to the Noachic laws as biblical authority in behalf of her position. For the Noachic laws express the grace of God for all his creatures on the earth. The implication seems to be that since Judaism accepts the Noachic view of creation, the Jewish religion, vis-à-vis non-Jewish religions, incorporates an attitude of "live and let live." She writes:

... Israel does not overstep the limits of its own identity, either to define itself as a universal necessity for all, nor to define in detail that "universalism" for "all men." We are left with the unstated conclusion that Israel knows what righteousness is for itself. Other peoples have to discover for themselves what God demands of them. Looking beyond its specific identity and divine commands, Israel sees what is general to all people in the Noachian Laws. What is comparable to Torah for others is not knowable or definable from within the context of Israel's revelation (Ruether pp. 236–37).

"Unstated conclusion," indeed! It is true that the Noachic laws affirm all creatures as God's creatures. But this does not permit our author to draw her own conclusion for Judaism that "other peoples have to discover for themselves what God demands of them." Much less does it permit one to suppose that something other than Torah, something "comparable to Torah" (whatever that could mean) would be regarded as theologically legitimate

by faithful Jews. The history of the Jewish people shows quite clearly that until recent centuries the Torah was regarded as “absolute,” so unequivocally absolute, as we stated earlier, that before and after the Diaspora a powerful class of Jewish religious leaders actively sought to inculcate Gentiles with Jewish religion. The Noachic laws, founded on the ancient Israelite belief about the Creator’s relationship to his creatures, permit no conclusion to be drawn about the “religions” of the creatures; but this hardly means that Judaism is neutral on the question of “religions.” The Noachian ideal does indeed affirm the Christian inasmuch as he and she are creatures; but for Judaism there is a world of theological difference between the words “Christian” and “creatures.”

The history of Judaism shows that Jews felt little or no reason to change the original rabbinic assessment of Christianity as a heretical messianic sect. If today Jewish theologians are themselves moved by the ecumenical spirit not to stress the sharp theological differences which divide them from Christians, one should not doubt that these differences exist and are deeply felt.

Ever since the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) in nineteenth century European Jewish life, and the development of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (the systematic study of Jewish history and culture), there has been a tendency to distinguish Jesus from the Church, to argue that the Jewish messianic prophet, in whose name the Christian religion was founded, cannot be held responsible for the doctrines and institutions that later developed in Christianity. A typical thinker in this respect was Martin Buber, who differentiated the ethical religion of Jesus from the later Pauline mystical religion of Christ. Buber’s differentiation expresses the nineteenth century German liberal view of the New Testament, a mode of thinking which came under severe criticism in the twentieth century, with the work of Johannes Weiss, Wilhelm Wrede, and Albert Schweitzer. All this development seems to be ignored by Professor Ruether, who uncritically adopts the same differentiation between a Jewish Jesus and a Pauline Christology. But there is a difference between the uses to which the differentiation is put. Whereas Jewish thinkers acknowledge the authentic Jewish *historical* root of Christianity, and speak of the Jewish Jesus as a symbol of this Jewish root, Ruether goes beyond history to employ the Jewish Jesus as a theological foundation to which Christianity can return, thereby reuniting itself with its “brother” Judaism. Consider her words:



Both [Christianity and Judaism] remain in unresolved relation to each other, each claiming to carry on the one covenant of God with Israel. The elder brother carries it on through an exegesis still based on the original 'cornerstone' of Abraham and Moses. The younger claims it through a foreshortening of history on the one side, and a foundation upon the Jew Jesus, who is the aperture through which it inherits Jesus' Jewish identity (Ruether p. 254).

One is compelled to say in reaction to this statement that the doctrinal development of the two religions leaves little reason to believe that they are in a "relation to each other," much less in one "unresolved." The theme of the "one covenant of God with Israel" appearing in both Judaism and Christianity came to mean markedly different things in the two traditions, a difference which is hardly explained by the unsupported judgment that Christianity built illegitimately on a Jewish "cornerstone."

We have argued that neither the evidence of the New Testament, nor the historical evidence of Jewish-Christian relations permits our author's judgment that Christology is inherently anti-Judaic. But both the New Testament canon and the history of the early church show that the conjoining of the confession of Jesus Christ and the condemnation of Jews came about as a result of the initially competitive, eventually combative relationship between church and synagogue. The source of Christian anti-Judaism is not Christian thinking, *per se*, but the political purposes to which it was put. Christian anti-Judaism is a historical development, and the theologically couched anti-Judaism of the church's thinkers from the late first century on is part of this historical development.

But where does this leave the constructive question of eradicating anti-Judaism from Christianity? We begin by repeating what was said in the preceding chapter: theology cannot undo history. Doctrinal formulations (or reformulations) will not end anti-Judaism, much less anti-Semitism, because history shows both to be complex phenomena which depend heavily on political, social and economic factors, as well as on the intellectual and theological developments which give expression to these factors. The shortcoming of Ruether's study in this regard is that she so narrowly confines her analysis to purely doctrinal expressions of Christian antipathy to Jews as to ignore the important way in which Christian anti-Judaism reflects the socio-political relations between Christians and Jews at every stage of

European history. A case in point is her treatment of Nazi anti-Semitism. For her the historical line connecting Chalcedon and Auschwitz is straight and clear. However, study of nineteenth and twentieth century anti-Semitism, culminating with Nazism, shows that ideas, theological and other kinds, are ingredients in the complex, socio-political conditions that led to the oppression and destruction of Jews as a people.<sup>15</sup> Traditional Christian anti-Judaic doctrine was used by the Nazis within their racial ideology, and Nazi ideology, similar to other kinds of ideology, is less the cause than expression of socio-political aggression.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed Christian anti-Judaism should be ended, not under the mistaken judgment that a theological reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity is desirable or possible, but ended because Christian anti-Judaism is an inherent evil that distorts the Christian's understanding of Judaism, distorts the Christian's understanding of him/herself.<sup>17</sup> What this requires on the part of the Christians is not better theology, but better deeds. One hopes that Christians will cease to use their cross as a battle ax against Jews. Or as the Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkovitz puts it, "All we want of Christians is that they keep their hands off us and our children."<sup>18</sup> Ruether is aware that what really is required of Christians is not better theologies, but better deeds, for she observes:

Possibly anti-Judaism is too deeply embedded in the foundation of Christianity to be rooted out entirely without destroying the whole structure. We may have to settle for the sort of ecumenical goodwill that lives with theoretical inconsistency and opts for a modus operandi that assures practical cooperation between Christianity and Judaism (Ruether p. 228).

When Ruether moves from Christological reformulations to analysis of the anti-Judaic uses or misuses of Christian thought, she makes an insightful contribution to ending the enmity between church and synagogue. The classical Christian theology of time, in which history is divided between old and new aeons, continues to be used to derogate Jews as part of the old aeon. Ruether rightly argues that what is needed from the Christian is the recognition that the theological forms through which he or she expresses the ultimate truths of faith are themselves relative. This means that Christians are not permitted to elevate their theological ideas to a position of absoluteness, in relation to which all other theological conceptions,

including those of Judaism, are relative. In this regard our author gives sage advice when she urges the abandonment of that traditional Christian theological imperialism in which the Hebrew Bible is interpreted through the eyes of New Testament revelation, or when she denounces Christian teaching which views first century Jewish religion through the prejudicial stereotypes, “Pharisaism” and “legalism.”

The acknowledgment of the relativity of theological forms makes possible the recognition of anti-Judaic elements in Christian thinking; it also makes possible a freedom to approach Judaism and Christianity as independent, historical religious traditions, to be understood on their own terms. Surely here is the beginning point in any future intelligible, responsible, and effective Jewish-Christian dialogue.

## Notes

1. Rosemary Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974).
2. Study conducted by the Survey Research Center, University of California at Berkeley, cited by Joseph L. Lichten, "The Council's Statement on the Jews" *The Star and the Cross*, Katherine Hargrove, ed., (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1966), pp. 223–226.
3. Thomas A. Idinopulos and Roy Bowen Ward, "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic? A Critical Review of Rosemary Ruether's *Faith and Fratricide*," *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, 45/2. (1977), p. 197.
4. Birger Pearson, "I Thessalonians 2: 13-16: A Deutero-Pauline Interpolation," *Harvard Theological Review* (1971), pp. 64, 79–94.
5. Idinopulos and Ward, op. cit., p. 198.
6. Ibid., p. 198.
7. Ibid., p. 199.
8. Salo Baron, quoted from Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), p. 26.
9. Flannery, *ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
10. Flannery, *ibid.*, p. 14.
11. Seneca cited in Flannery, *ibid.*, p. 14.
12. Schleiermacher wrote "...[Christian] doctrines in all their forms have their ultimate ground so exclusively in the emotion of the religious self-consciousness, that where these do not exist the doctrines cannot arise." Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, English Translation of the Second German Edition (1928), p. 78.
13. If one accepts the thesis of Joel Carmichael, Jesus is to be viewed as a Jewish religious insurgent, who was as much concerned to achieve a revolution in the narrow world of Jewish priestly religion, against which he spoke, as in the wider political world of the Roman Empire, whose laws he had broken. See Joel Carmichael, *The Death of Jesus* (London: Pelican Books, 1966).
14. "I own to seeing no originality in the teaching of Jesus, for I hold that those passages which deal with his supernatural role reflect not his authentic words but the piety of the developing church. As to those teachings which are conceivably his, they seem to me to be of a piece with Jewish teachings, and that they range from the commonplaces of that Jewish teaching through a sporadic flash of insight that other Jewish teachers also achieved." Samuel Sandmel, *We Jews and Jesus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 109. For a somewhat different judgment on the question of Jesus' "originality" by a Jewish scholar, see also the writings of Claude Montefiore.

15. Hannah Arendt seems to regard Christian institutions and ideas as playing a minor role in the development of Nazi policies directed against Jews. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1951).
16. Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1961).
17. Franz Rosenzweig, who contended that Christianity is a legitimate expression of the basic Hebraic vision, is usually cited as an exception to the view that Judaism and Christianity are theologically irreconcilable. However, what is seldom appreciated is that Rosenzweig's thinking on both Judaism and Christianity, as well as his early personal attraction to Christian faith, were deeply influenced by the modernist culture of late nineteenth century Germany, wherein Judaism was adjudged an anachronism, and Christianity was taken, Hegel-fashion, as a later, more valid expression of the divine-human spirit. For Rosenzweig in his early years, as for many of his contemporaries, the Jew who wished to remain a Jew could choose Zionism as an alternative to Judaism. But Rosenzweig came to reject these assessments when he recognized the trans-historical, 'existential' element in Judaism which makes it possible for the Jew to be both a man of faith and a man of the twentieth century culture.

Nahum Glatzer writes, "Rosenzweig's work is the first attempt in Jewish theological thought to understand Judaism and Christianity as equally 'true' and valid views of reality. Yet this does not lead to a suggestion of compromise or to a wish for harmonization." *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought, Presented by Nahum Glatzer* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. xxv.

In this context one should also consider the view of the distinguished Anglican scholar of Jewish-Christian relations, James Parkes who, while acknowledging structural continuity between Jewish and Christian beliefs, held for the essential differences that make Judaism "not an alternative scheme of salvation to Christianity, *but a different kind of religion*." Roy Eckardt, *Elder and Younger Brothers: The Encounter of Jews and Christians* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), p. 83. See also Parkes, *Prelude to Dialogue* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), esp. Part IV.

18. Berkowitz, "Judaism in the Post-Christian Era," *Judaism* (1966) 15/1, pp. 79–86.



*Eradicating Anti-Judaism from  
The Book of Common Prayer*

Clark Williamson and Rosemary Ruether make powerful indictments of anti-Judaism in the scriptures and theology of Christianity. To eradicate anti-Judaism Williamson advances a theology of love in which he defines Christianity as “a guest in the house of Israel.” Ruether condemns the fratricidal relationship between Judaism and Christianity and speaks of ridding Christology of anti-Judaism by advancing a new doctrine of the “proleptic Christ.” My numerous criticisms of the views of these two distinguished thinkers are based in history and religion.

While it is true that the Christian religion evolved historically from the Jewish religion, it is also true that within a relatively short time Christianity acquired a religious identity of its own. In my view, the anti-Judaism that became a part of Christian thinking was a deplorable development, due less to some sort of animus against Jews and Judaism inherent in Christian faith than to the socio-political tensions dividing Jews and inherent in the early centuries of the Common Era. However, to say this leaves unanswered the question: What should a Christian think and do about the anti-Judaism that was, and to a degree remains, a part of Christian faith?

My own wrestling with this question takes the form of three proposals. First, I believe that Christians should admit the presence of anti-Judaism in their scriptures and theology; second, Christians should do their utmost to learn about the historical conditions that led to anti-Judaic attitudes in the New Testament and church doctrine; and, third, Christians should recognize that when the meaning of their faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ is presented as an absolute truth, Christian triumphalism is perpetuated, sewing the seeds of enmity between Christians on one side and all other religious peoples, including Jews, on the other side. My own proposals focus more on education than on theology. The proposals assume openness, honesty, humility, courage — simple human virtues that require less ingenuity of mind than exercise of will. Without these virtues none of my proposals, nor any of the recommendations made by

Williamson or Ruether, will make a difference in Christian-Jewish relations. It is not for the sake of some vague ecumenical ideal, but rather for the sake of their integrity (intellectually, religiously, morally) that Christians must cease practicing their religion at the expense of Jews and other non-Christians, and accept themselves as only one of the many religious peoples on the earth. In this regard, the one critical task facing the Christian theologian is to formulate and present a non-absolutistic statement of faith that does not diminish or otherwise obscure Christianity's uniqueness.

It is good to say that progressive and positive steps have been made in recent years by Roman Catholic and American Episcopalian theologians concerned to revise church liturgy to rid it of anti-Judaism. In February 1976 the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church published a proposed revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*. The commission, for the first time, officially recommended "The Reproaches" hymn, adopted from the traditional Roman Catholic rite, for use in the Good Friday service. On any simple reading, this hymn is a condemnation of the biblical people of Israel for their faithlessness in responding to their God-wrought deliverance from Egyptian bondage by the criminal ingratitude of rejecting and crucifying Christ the Savior.

It was unclear just what the liturgical commission would propose to the 65<sup>th</sup> General Convention, which met September 11–23, 1976, in Minneapolis. Episcopalians found themselves embroiled in a quiet but painful controversy. In the April 15 *New York Times*, religion editor Kenneth A. Briggs wrote of the "growing concern among those who believe ["The Reproaches" hymn] contains the seeds of anti-Semitism," and describes the reactions of both Jews and Roman Catholics to their continued use in the liturgy. On May 19, 1977, the liturgical commission responded to critical reactions by backing away from its original recommendations with this resolution.

*Whereas*, the Standing Liturgical Commission included in the Good Friday liturgy of *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer* the ancient "Reproaches," two moving poems cast in Old Testament imagery contrasting the great good Jesus has accomplished for the salvation of the human race with its rejection and crucifixion of him; and



*Whereas*, since the publication of *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, the Commission has received a number of communications from groups and individuals within the Episcopal Church, including scholars and liturgists, as well as from Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish leaders, indicating that this material conveys undesirable anti-Jewish overtones, although it has been used unofficially in a number of our parishes for many years without evoking this response; and

*Whereas*, the Commission, throughout the production of *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, has made it a matter of policy to be sensitive to the feelings of all those who in any way might be offended by words or acts provided in the liturgy; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, that the Standing Liturgical Commission establish a committee to supply suitable texts to replace "The Reproaches," and to present the substitutes to the Commission for its approval prior to the meeting of the General Convention in September 1976.

But "The Reproaches" also have their defenders among Episcopalians and Roman Catholics, and more recently among Lutherans. Richard John Neuhaus, then editor of the Lutheran *Forum Letter*, argued that whatever is a historical part of church tradition should also be accepted as an essential ingredient of Christian faith; he speaks against the idea that Roman Catholics and other Christians should drop "The Reproaches" and urges Lutherans to incorporate them in their own liturgy.<sup>1</sup> As voices were added to this deepening and widening controversy, it is important to understand the historical origins and uses of the two poems that constitute "The Reproaches" hymn. Here are the poems as they appeared in *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer* (Church Hymnal Corporation, 1976).

The Reproaches: I

*O my people, what have I done to thee,  
or wherein have I wearied thee?*

*Testify against me.*

Because I led thee forth from the land of Egypt,  
thou has prepared a cross for thy Savior.

*Holy God,  
Holy and Mighty,  
Holy Immortal One,  
Have mercy upon us.*

What more could I have done unto thee  
that I have not done?  
I indeed did plant thee,  
O my chosen and my fairest vine,  
and thou art become very bitter unto me.  
When I was thirsty, thou gavest me vinegar to drink,  
and thou hast pierced with a spear the side of thy Savior.

*Holy God,  
Holy and Mighty,  
Holy Immortal One,  
Have mercy upon us.*

The Reproaches: II

I scourged Egypt with its firstborn for thy sake, and thou has scourged  
me and delivered me up.

I led thee out of Egypt, drowning Pharaoh in the Red Sea,  
and thou hast delivered me to the chief priests.

I opened the sea before thee,  
and thou hast opened my side with a spear.

*O my people, what have I done unto thee,  
or wherein have I wearied thee?*

*Testify against me.*

I struck down the kings of Canaan for thy sake,  
and thou hast struck my head with a reed.

I gave thee a royal scepter,  
and thou hast given my head a crown of thorns.

I raised thee on high with great power,  
and thou hast hanged me on the gibbets of the cross.

*O my people, what have I done unto thee,  
or wherein have I wearied thee?*

*Testify against me.*

In recent times ecumenical-minded Roman Catholic clergy have treated these verses as expressions of their own sense of responsibility for the crucifixion — the Christian's symbolic confession of identification with "faithless" Israel. Presumably, Episcopal liturgists would similarly defend the use of "The Reproaches" in their Good Friday service. However, seldom do ordinary lay Christians fulfill the ecumenical and theological expectations of their church leaders. On Good Friday each year thousands of Christians sing "The Reproaches" as they have been sung for centuries — as an indictment of the ancient Israelites, hence of their modern descendants, the Jewish people. Apart from what "The Reproaches" *mean* in the minds and hearts of Christian worshipers, there is a fundamental question: Is the religious integrity of Judaism properly perceived and respected when one of its most vital beliefs, the deliverance of Israel, is utilized as a foil for the commemoration of Christ's Passion? Historical study of the origins of "The Reproaches" reveals the second century practice of adoring the dying Christ while simultaneously disparaging Jewish faith.

The source of "The Reproaches" is presumably the Passion Homily of Melito, Bishop of Sardes, thought to have lived 120-185 CE.<sup>2</sup> The circumstances that produced "The Reproaches" involved the Quatrodeciman movement, of which Melito was an advocate. The Quatrodecimans had followed the Asiatic practice of celebrating Easter on the same date as the Jewish Passover; this was well before the Council of Nicaea in 325 established the canonical dates of Easter. According to Eric Werner, "This meant that . . . the death and resurrection of Jesus were put on the same day as the memory of the Exodus from Egypt." "The Reproaches" came into being as a reaction to this coincidence of Passover and Easter, that is, to defend Christians against the charge of being Judaizers. Melito borrowed the form of the Dayenu chant from the Jewish Passover Seder, wherein the worshiper expresses his gratitude for God's benefits bestowed on his people, Israel, beginning with the Exodus. But Melito proceeded to parody the Dayenu, giving it an "anti-Jewish twist" (Werner, pp. 193, 201), in which the theme of gratitude is replaced by one of ingratitude, Israel's ingratitude, reaching its nadir in the scourging and crucifixion of the Savior. Hence, Melito, in first expressing liturgically the charge of deicide against Jews (a charge initially insinuated in John's Gospel), becomes "the first poet of Deicide." The homily reaches its climax with the words "God has been murdered, the King of Israel has been slain by an Israelitish hand." (Werner, p. 207)

Werner observes that the Passion Homily is an “instance of utilizing Jewish material against the Jews — a method that goes through the ages up to this very day.” (Werner, p. 207)

Melito’s work influenced subsequent Christian thinkers, both Greek and Latin, including the most virulent of all anti-Judaic theologians, St. John Chrysostom. The verses drawn from Melito’s homily were incorporated into both the Byzantine and Georgian as well as Latin liturgies, the earliest text appearing in the seventh century. In the Greek Orthodox morning service for Good Friday, in use today, can be found the following passage, whose lineage is unmistakable.

The Jews, O Lord, condemned Thee to death, Thou Life of all; and they whom Thou didst cause to cross the Red Sea nailed Thee on a Cross. They, to whom Thou gave honey from the rock to eat, offered Thee gall. Albeit, Thou endured it willingly in order to deliver us from bondage to an enemy. O Christ our God, glory to Thee.

Episcopal liturgists, in adopting “The Reproaches,” seem to be engaged in a well-meaning, if unthinking effort to establish a common ground of worship with Roman Catholics for the sake of Christian unity. But, here is an irony: The Episcopalians’ liturgical innovations come at a time when Roman Catholics are re-examining their liturgy to eliminate from it precisely those attitudes that are in error about, or prejudicial to, Jews and Judaism. A scrutiny of successive editions of the “Missal” supports this view, particularly the material bearing on Jews that accompanies “The Reproaches” in the Good Friday service.

For centuries Catholics had recited a blatantly anti-Jewish prayer composed by St. Augustine, which followed “The Reproaches” in the rite of the veneration of the cross.

Let not the Jews say: we did not kill Christ. For they submitted him to Pilate as judge, so that they seemed almost absolved from his death. For when Pilate said to them: You kill him, they replied: we are not permitted to kill anybody. They wanted to shift the infamy of their foul deed to a human judge; but did they deceive God, the divine judge? Whatever Pilate did, and wherein he was committed, he was to a degree an accomplice; yet in comparison with them, he was much less culpable.

St. Augustine's prayer was eliminated in the "Saint Andrew Missal" in 1952, widely used in Great Britain and elsewhere, but what was retained is the traditional prayer which precedes "The Reproaches" — a prayer for the conversion of the Jews, containing the phrase "faithless Jews" (*perfidis Judaeis*).

Let us pray also for the faithless Jews: that our God and Lord would withdraw the veil from their hearts: that they also may acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ...Almighty and eternal God, who drivest not away from Thy mercy even the faithless Jews: hear our prayers, which we offer for the blindness of that people: that acknowledge the light of Thy truth, which is Christ, they may be delivered from their darkness. Through the same our Lord.

The "Maryknoll Missal" of 1964, used by American Catholics, reflects the Vatican II declaration on the Jews and the decree of Pope John XXIII that the expression "faithless Jews" be eliminated. Although the same point about conversion is made, the prayer preceding "The Reproaches" is renamed "For the Jews," upon the decision of Pope Paul VI. Here, for the first time, the divine promise to Abraham and his descendants is acknowledged. And in keeping with the spirit of Pope John's dictum, the stress shifts from the Jews' faithless rejection of the Redeemer to God's own initiatives in bringing the Jews to the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray that our God and Lord will look kindly on the Jews, so that they too may acknowledge the Redeemer of all, Jesus Christ our Lord.... Almighty and eternal God, you made the promises to Abraham and his descendants. In your goodness hear the prayers of your Church so that the people whom from of old you made your own may come to the fullness of redemption. Through Jesus Christ.

The "We Worship Seasonal Missal" is currently in use across the United States. Here one finds more remarkable changes in the service for Good Friday. While there is the usual prayer for the Jews (this time the title reflects the curious American penchant for substituting the phrase "Jewish people" for "Jews"), the traditional theme of conversion seems to have been dropped. In its place is substituted the vague statement "We pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption,"

leaving it to the imagination of the worshiper to interpret the meaning of “fullness.”

Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant. Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption.

This prayer, far from condemning Jews for their faithless rejection of Christ, makes no explicit reference to Christ and seems to exhort Jews to grow in their own expressed faithfulness. When the words of this prayer are set alongside the traditional sentiments of “The Reproaches” (which are again included in the “We Worship Missal”), there is a sharp antithesis, which itself raises an important question. If the Roman Catholic liturgy is being revised in an effort to eliminate anti-Judaic attitudes, how long will it be before “The Reproaches” themselves are removed altogether from the Good Friday service? For all the good poetry and sweet music experienced by the faithful in singing these verses do not alter one iota the historical and theological distortions propagated about Judaism.

“The Reproaches” have never before appeared in any authorized edition of *The Book of Common Prayer*. The collects, or short prayers, used for Good Friday have in the past contained references to Jews, but a study of successive editions of the text shows how far the Anglican church has come in eliminating anti-Judaic attitudes from its own liturgy.

A prayer for the Good Friday service contained in the 1898 edition had been used continuously since the first edition of *The Book of Common Prayer* in 1549.

O merciful God, who hast made all men and hatest nothing that thou made, nor desirest the death of a sinner, but rather he should be converted and live; HAVE mercy upon all Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics; and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart and contempt of thy WORD; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

For the 1928 edition, the prayer was revised.

O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou has made, nor desireth the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live; Have mercy upon all who know thee not as thou art revealed in the Gospel of thy Son. Take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy fold, that they may be one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

This version of the prayer, which surgically excises references to “Jews, Turks, infidels and heretics,” and which eliminates the boastful claim “true Israelites,” has been in use by Anglicans and American Episcopalians since 1928. The revision in *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer* in no significant way alters its central point, *i.e.*, beseeching God to forgive those who ignore or reject the Gospel, returning them to knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Merciful God, creator of all the peoples of the earth and lover of souls: Have compassion on all who do not know you as you are revealed in your Son Jesus Christ; let your Gospel be preached with grace and power to those who have not heard it; turn the hearts of those who resist it; and bring home to your fold those who have gone astray; that there may be one flock under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord.

This prayer seems to raise questions to which “The Reproaches,” immediately following it, provide the answers. Who are those who have not heard the gospel? Whose hearts have resisted it? Who are they who have gone astray? “The Reproaches” give the reply, they are the ancient Israelites and, by extension, their descendants the Jews.

“The Reproaches” have been proposed as an optional part of the Good Friday services. But our concern as Christians should be that the inclusion of “The Reproaches” in the prayer book, under whatever conditions, legitimizes what is historically and theologically illegitimate. “The Reproaches” revive Christian distortions against Jews and Judaism, and for this reason they should be eliminated not only from the newly proposed

edition of *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, but from the liturgies of Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy as well.

"The Reproaches" propagate the historical falsehood that the biblical people Israel, hence the Jewish people, are collectively responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. By contrast, consider the words of the late Cardinal Augustin Bea, who had a great influence in changing Roman Catholic minds on this point, "The Jews of our time can hardly be accused of the crimes committed against Christ, so far removed are they from those deeds. Actually, even in the times of Christ, the majority of the chosen people did not cooperate with the leaders of the people condemning Christ."<sup>3</sup> Or, consider the attitude of Gregory Baum, expressed in this statement, "We must prevent presenting the passion of Jesus as if all Jews, or Jews only, have incurred the odium of the crucifixion. Not all Jews demanded the death of Jesus. Not only Jews were responsible for it."<sup>4</sup>

The theological judgment made in "The Reproaches" is no less false than the historical. It is assumed that the very meaning of Israel's existence as a sacred people resided somehow in the revelation of Jesus Christ as the Savior. Through the old patristic practice of theological telescoping Israel is grafted onto the cross of Christ. The meaning of the Hebraic covenant as a distinct revelation of God is thereby invalidated. Here "The Reproaches" stand in stark opposition to the Vatican II declaration on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religions. While professing the ultimate unity of all peoples in Christ, the Vatican Council found no contradiction in acknowledging the integrity and authenticity of the traditions of Jewish faith.

In a seminal study of Christian anti-Semitism, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue*, James Parkes acknowledges the presence of anti-Judaic texts in early liturgical forms and sermons, particularly at Easter.<sup>5</sup> The theological anti-Judaism which grew out of these texts was often the intellectual rationale for ecclesiastical and civil decrees directed against Jews continuously after the fourth century. One might suppose that the freedom of Jews today to live and worship in predominantly Christian America had fashioned a happy ending to the long, melancholy story of Jewish/Christian relations in the West. If this were really so, then perhaps the use of "The Reproaches" in American churches could be viewed as an unhappy reminder of one of the more dismal traditions of the church. But the matter may not be so simple. If a study conducted in the mid-1980s on patterns



of American anti-Semitic attitudes remains valid, then a surprisingly large minority of American Christians continue to hold the Jewish people as a whole responsible in some sense for the death of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> It would be impossible to demonstrate what role "The Reproaches" have played in promoting this view, consciously or unconsciously, during the heightened feeling of the Good Friday service. But what is beyond doubt is that "The Reproaches" function psychologically to justify and legitimize such a view.

In January, 1977, the American Episcopal Church published its proposed *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, in which the old "Reproaches" are not included. This decision reflected the struggle between traditionalists and progressives in the church. It seems that minimal concession was made to the old tradition of "The Reproaches." In "The Solemn Collects for Good Friday" one finds after the words, "Let us pray for all who have not received the Gospel of Christ," this crucial phrase, "For those who are enemies of Christ and persecutors of his disciples." Just who these "enemies" and "persecutors" might be is left unidentified.

In looking back on this struggle to revise *The Book of Common Prayer* in ways that eliminates anti-Judaic sentiments, one is reminded of the dynamism of liturgy itself. Traditionalists will argue that the canon of the New Testament is sacred and that no part of scripture can be altered, whether or not it contains anti-Judaism. Perhaps. But, it is indisputably true that liturgy is a human creation in words and music for worshipping God. This human creation will change, as it must, with time and need. The measure of change was shown by Episcopalian Denis G. Michno, in his liturgical guide, *A Priest's Handbook*, 1983, in which the old "Reproaches" are reprinted for possible use and immediately after them one finds a revised set of hymns in which some drastic changes have occurred. In the reference to "O my people" [Israel], the new words, "O my Church," are immediately added, so as to make the reproach apply equally to Christians and Jews. Additionally, in the last part of the Reproach these words appear, "I grafted you [the Church] into the tree of my chosen Israel and you turned on them with persecution and mass murder / I made you joint heirs with them of my covenants but you made them scapegoats for your own guilt."

Indeed, the Episcopalians in their liturgical changes are pointing the way for a new basis of relationship between Christians and Jews. Let us hope the spirit of liturgical change continues in the same direction for all churches.

*Notes*

1. Richard John Neuhaus, *Forum Letter*, vol 5, no. 6.
2. Eric Werner, "Melito of Sardes, The First Poet of Deicide," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol 37 (1966), pp. 191-210.
3. Kung, Congar, O'Hanlon, eds., *Council Speeches of Vatican II*, (New York: Deus Books, 1964).
4. Gregory Baum, *The Quest For Christian Unity* (New York: Sheed & Ward. 1963).
5. James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).
6. Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, "Christian Belief and Anti-Semitism" (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) as cited in John G. Gager, *Anti-Semitism in the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1985), p. 21.

## Part Three

Fateful Connections:  
Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust



## *The Nazi Vision of Utopia*

### I

Forty years of teaching show me that the most widely shared misunderstanding of my students is the impact of anti-Semitism on the Holocaust. Most students, especially before studying the event, are prepared to believe that anti-Semitism caused the Holocaust, simple and straightforward. A few of them, in the face of contrary evidence, will even cling to this position at the conclusion of the course, because they are determined to find, in traditional Christian anti-Jewish hostility, the devil they seek. The majority, responding to a new awareness, recognize that while anti-Semitism did indeed form the background of Nazi genocide, a necessary cause is not also a sufficient one.

The task we have set ourselves is to explain the relation of anti-Semitism to the Holocaust, and religion and racism to genocide. Certainly anti-Semitism lies behind the Holocaust because without 2,000 years of Christian hostility and hatred against Judaism and Jews, the actions of the Nazis would never have occurred. But, it is also true to say that anti-Semitism as such does not wholly account for the Holocaust. There were numerous other factors.

The Holocaust stands for genocide: wholesale murder of an entire nation/people. Religiously motivated hostility, as we know of it from 2000 years of church history, despite the anti-Jewish vituperations and discriminations, did not produce genocide. The medieval church forbade murder and it gave its blessing to, and even eagerly sought, Jewish converts to the church.

To repeat, Christian anti-Judaism prepared the way for Nazi anti-Semitism, but did not directly cause the Nazi genocide. I feel confident in saying this when I read the testimony of an eminent Jewish scholar who survived those terrible years and testified at the Adolph Eichmann trial. I am referring to Salo Baron. Called as an expert historical witness, Professor Baron said at Eichmann's trial:

... the Nazi movement not only brought the wheels back, the wheels of modern progress...it brought the world new and unprecedented fundamentals different from the entire two-thousand and more year history of anti-Semitism.”<sup>1</sup>

If not in Christian church history, where, then, do we look for the ultimate causal explanation of the Holocaust? To ask this question is to be reminded of a remark made by Hitler, a remark which seemed to be off-handed at the time, but which turned out to speak volumes about the events that would later occur. In one of his frequent tirades he found himself contrasting traditional religious anti-Semitism from his own vision of Jew-hatred. Hitler’s words were: “One should not think that the Jew can cease being a Jew with a splash of baptismal water.” (Paraphrased) In that remark lies Hitler’s vision of the “The Eternal Jew.”<sup>2</sup> One remembers the Nazi propaganda film, “The Eternal Jew,” initiated and overseen by Joseph Goebbels in 1939–40. (Friedlander, p. 100)

“The Eternal Jew” became language for a racial conception of Jews as a nation/people. When race and racism became rooted in German minds, one could speak of the Jewish race and attach conceptions or misconceptions to Jews, *e.g.*, Jews have certain physical, social, and psychological properties and these properties are inherited — genetically determined properties like height, hair, eye-color, and so on. To this conception, or misconception, of race it does not matter that massive amounts of evidence demonstrate that Jews are of every physical, geographic and ethnic composition, of every gender, height, hair, eye-color found on earth.

When the only reliable and usable definition of race is for the practical purpose of classifying types (and only that), then Jews must be understood to be a variety of racial types or classifications. Certainly Jews are not one race. They are a people, or a nation/people, if you will, unified by a common outlook broadly defined as tradition — tradition effectively seen in a shared historical-religious outlook.

Western intellectual history shows us that some years after Charles Darwin published his pioneering work demonstrating the physical evolution of the human species, the era of so-called “Social Darwinism” set in. It was an era in which intellectuals sought to apply Darwin’s ideas of physical evolution to society and history. The key concept in their thinking was race, especially the notion of the pre-determined and unalterable

characteristics of race. In their minds race determined who a person is, what a person thinks and feels, what a person did, does, or will do. Race, in other words, was equated with human destiny.

Race thinking strongly influenced Western intellectuals in England, France and Germany in the second half of the nineteenth-century. In Germany, race thinking led to racist ideas about Jews, *e.g.*, that Jews are an alien race wherever they are found and, for that reason, Jews can never be patriotic or loyal to their country even when they are native-born to a country. The stereotype of the Jewish obsession with money came out of racist thinking. So did the image of the Jew as perpetually seeking to take material advantage of non-Jews. The heart of anti-Jewish racist thinking is that Jews are a deceitful race and can never be trusted by non-Jews. Such thinking reinforced the image of the "The Eternal Jew."

Books by George Mosse and Jacob Katz show us how German race theorists influenced early German anti-Semitic ideologists.<sup>3</sup> Here I should mention the names of Wilhelm Marr (who coined the expression "anti-Semitism"), Adolph Stoecker, Eugen Düring, Theodore Fritsch (three early and well-known anti-Semitic writers and theorists), and Huston Stewart Chamberlain (the Englishman who became an ardent Germanophile, married Richard Wagner's daughter, and was eulogized at his funeral by Adolph Hitler). We begin to appreciate the popularity of late nineteenth century German anti-Semitic ideology by noting that Theodore Fritsch's little book *Handbook of Antisemitism*, published in 1896, went into 36 editions and sold millions of copies before the First World War.

It is important to say that while late nineteenth century German race ideologists like Marr, Fritsch, and Chamberlain were anti-Semitic writers that influenced the Nazis, none of them to my knowledge thought of ridding German society of the unwanted Jew through murder. But Hitler thought this way. It is with Hitler that racial anti-Semitism takes an extremely radical and revolutionary turn. The story of that turn is the story of Hitler and the Nazis, Germany and the Jews. In this regard, it is well to ponder a short statement of Jacob Katz that speaks of Hitler's direct responsibility for the Holocaust.

In retrospect — but only in retrospect — it is not difficult to see that Hitler, in many respects a man of exceptional ability, was

possessed by a Jew-hating mania which was a basic element in his psychological make-up. Nor was this anti-Semitic ideology an incidental feature of his world-view, but a central motive in his thinking and imagination. It was a conviction he shared with other members of the movement, who had been nurtured by the same intellectual sources in their formative years. The contention that Jews were absolutely depraved had so often been reiterated by theologians, cranks, philosophers, and demagogues, that it had finally become internalized by revolutionaries determined to act upon it. They were not troubled by the validity of the contention or the wisdom of its consequences. Linked to the racial theory, which was for them a comprehensive *weltanschauung*, the anti-Jewish doctrine was an incontestable truth. Thus the paragraph in the Nazi party program that denied Jews the right of German citizenship was immediately put into operation. But this was no more than the openly declared consequence of the racial theory. Not yet mentioned was, but already contemplated, in Hitler's mind at least, was [sic] the physical annihilation of the Jews. The basic principle of radical anti-Semitism, the denial to Jews of the right to exist, came here to a wholly unexpected, but not inconsistent, fruition as the policy of a government.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Let me change the subject for a moment. The distinction between religious anti-Judaism and racial anti-Semitism is the kind of distinction that professors like to make because it is a sound distinction: clear, neat, rational, persuasive, academic. But to leave it there is to overlook the subtleties, the nuances, the quietly hidden and not-so-hidden meanings. If one looks beneath the surface of Nazi anti-Semitism, if one plumbs the depths of what Professor Katz refers to as the Nazi *weltanschauung*, one begins to see patterns of meaning that are religious patterns and remind us of the medieval Crusades. If we examine these patterns carefully we begin to feel the line separating racial anti-Semitism and religious anti-Jewish hostility blurring.

To understand this let us begin with the medieval crusades, particularly the First Crusade of 1095, when thousands of Jews were massacred in the cities and towns of the Rhine River valley. It may not have been the original



intention of the Crusader knights and peasants to commit genocide, but the effect was the same. The destruction of property and the murder of Jews were so frightening to church officials that when the call came for a second crusade, the pope and bishops officially forbade any anti-Jewish actions on the part of the crusaders. It may be correct to say that the First Crusade was an isolated event — isolated, that is, until the emergence of the Nazis. Historically, this is where the line between religious anti-Jewish hostility and racial anti-Semitism blurs, and where discernment of the subtleties in the Nazi *weltanschauung* matters.

Our tendency today is to interpret the First Crusade of 1095 as a medieval event, a Christian event, and thus ignore its connection to the Holocaust of the twentieth century. We seem justified in doing so because the Nazi movement was a political, racial and ideological movement not obviously a religious, messianic, prophetic cause. We were led to think (I was one of those) that when Hitler said a splash of baptismal water can never change the Jew into a Christian we were prepared to accept the differentiation of religious anti-Jewish hostility from racial anti-Semitism, as categorical and final. In this we were mistaken. We were not prepared as we should have been to discern the subtleties of meaning in the Nazi *weltanschauung*.

We misjudged the Nazis because we uncritically accepted the standard view of Nazism as a wholly secular movement. What fed our myopia was the functionalism thesis of contemporary historians, many of them German, as Omer Bartov has shown in his book, *Germany's War and the Holocaust*.<sup>5</sup> These historians argue that the holocaust was not caused by anti-Semitism, mediaeval hatreds, Christianity; it was caused by socio-political-geographic facts confronting Germany the moment it initiated the war in 1939. Those facts were one, the need for *lebensraum* (the construction of a vast military-bureaucratic machine that totally disregarded individual human beings, Jewish and non-Jewish), and two, a secular totalitarian state ideology that came to govern every aspect of German society in order to serve that machine.

For a long time I accepted this functionalism thesis as explaining the causes of the Holocaust because I was prepared to accept the conclusions of functionalism historians. They concluded that the Holocaust was never planned or premeditated but just happened through a set of disconnected unintended events. And, that these events were haphazard reactions to

circumstances/facts facing Nazi Germany as it confronted one crisis after another, following initial military successes in Poland and the USSR.

I still accept the part of the structuralist thesis which stresses the haphazard aspects of Nazi military and political policy. But I began to change my mind about the overall structuralist thesis over the years, in part because I was haunted by the title of Lucy Davidowicz's book about the Holocaust entitled, *Hitler's War Against the Jews*.<sup>6</sup> I was never persuaded by the book, even though I used it for a few years in my course on the Holocaust. Those who have read the book know that in later editions she added material that included her sharply drawn, rather harsh criticism of the functionalist historians. This criticism served her own explanation of the Holocaust, an explanation which came to be called the "intentionalist account" of the Holocaust. The "intentionalist account," simply stated, is that the Holocaust was caused principally by Hitler, who had a life-long hatred of Jews and started his war in Europe as a framework for ridding the world of Jews.

It was especially Davidowicz's book title, "*Hitler's War Against the Jews*," that stayed with me. In this regard, it took me years to see the difference between form and content. Gradually, I began to see that while the content of Nazi anti-Semitism was radical, racial, and secular, looking at that anti-Semitism more deeply made me recognize that it was also religious and even messianic in form. I say religious and messianic in roughly the same way that Jew-hatred among the first medieval crusaders was religious and messianic. Thus, the phrase, "Hitler's war against the Jews" gave me my first clue in understanding the religious form of Nazi anti-Semitism.

There were other authors who convinced me to discard functionalism in favor of intentionalism: Here let me mention John Lukacs' book, *Hitler in History*, Saul Freidlander's, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol I, and Yehuda Bauer's *Re-examining Holocaust Thinking*. These books, together with the books of Omer Bartov and Yisrael Gutman's essay, "The Character of Nazi Antisemitism," convinced me that Hitler's anti-Semitism was radical because it was a mix of both racial and religious elements, a combination of messianism, medievalism, and crusader madness. The same inspired and destructive fervor that one finds in Peter the Hermit who led the crusader peasants against Jews in the Rhineland, one also finds in Adolph Hitler, who had convinced himself that Europe had to be rescued from the satanic evil of the Jew.<sup>7</sup>

## III

I am not the first person to draw the parallel between the First Crusade of 1095 and Hitler's war against Jews. The great British author Norman Cohn does so in his books on the destructive millenarian fantasies of the crusaders. Cohn identifies four features of the picture of salvation presented by the mediaeval millenarian sects. Salvation was pictured as one, collective in the sense that it is to be enjoyed by the faithful as a collectivity; two, terrestrial or this-worldly; three, total in the sense that it is to utterly transform life on earth; and four, miraculous in the sense that it is to be accomplished with the help of supernatural agency.<sup>8</sup>

Studies of Nazism by Yehuda Bauer, Saul Friedlander, John Lukacs, and Uriel Tal reinforce the view that Nazism represented the recrudescence of medieval millenarianism in its most destructive aspects.<sup>9</sup> Nazism's picture of salvation was collective (focused on *volksgemeinschafts* or people's community), terrestrial (or this-worldly), total (in wanting to transform the world), and certainly miraculous (a salvation wrought by the supernatural agency of God working through the people, the party, and their leader, Adolph Hitler).<sup>10</sup>

Other experiences that compel us to think of Nazism as a latter-day millenarian movement were the dislocation, distress, and humiliation Germany suffered in the loss of the First World War to the Allied powers. The number of dead, the economic depression, the ruination of currency, the humiliation of the Versailles Treaty, forced demilitarization, the loss of territory. All these induced a national feeling of despair among German peoples of all classes. Despair deepened with the overthrow of the Czarist regime and the Bolshevik reorganization of Russia into a union of Soviet states.

Not without reason, the threat of Communist revolution taking over Germany frightened most people. A Communist Germany would be welcomed only by urban workers who were voting in the early 1920s for the Social Democratic and Communist parties. Standing against these parties were the conservative Nationalist party, which included the Prussian landed elite, the upper middle class, urban professionals, and a great number of rural voters.

In addition, the handful of small, explicitly anti-Semitic parties, which came into being after 1871, conditioned the German people to the idea

that native-born Jews didn't belong to Germany and were the real cause of the debacle of the Great War and the ensuing miseries. The anti-Semitic parties also promoted the idea that Jews were the masterminds of the Bolshevik revolution and its spread to Germany. These one-issue parties never succeeded with the voters but they filled the political atmosphere with a sense of the Jew as the betrayer of the German nation. It was an idea that would provide a rich source of anti-Semitic rhetoric once the Nazi party came into being and dramatically increased its appeal to German voters in 1930–1933.

Norman Cohn reminds us that one of the central fantasies of the mediaeval revolutionary eschatology is the Manichean-Gnostic bifurcation of the cosmos into good and evil.<sup>11</sup> The fantasy: "The world is dominated by an evil, tyrannous power of boundless destructiveness — a power moreover which is imagined not simply as human but as demonic. The tyranny of that power will become outrageous, the suffering of its victims more and more intolerable until suddenly the hour will strike when the Saints are able to rise up and overthrow it. Then the Saints themselves, the chosen, holy people who hitherto have groaned under the oppressor's heel, shall in their turn inherit dominion over the whole earth. This will be the culmination of history ..."<sup>12</sup>

There should be no doubt that the Nazi party, which led an ideological movement with the characteristics of a religio-cultic sect, regarded itself as working towards the "culmination of history." And if there continues to be lingering doubt about how deeply or sincerely Hitler himself subscribed to the Manichean-Gnostic vision of the world, there should be no reason to doubt his capacity to persuade the German people as a whole that the Jews, and they alone, were the evil, the "tyrannous power" exercising sway over the world. In order to defeat the "tyrannous power," Hitler waged "a war against the Jews." And he waged that war, Hitler believed, in behalf of the Christian values of western civilization.

Hitler did not regard his war against the Jews as punitive or aggressive. It was to be a purely defensive war. Here is what he wrote at the end of the second chapter of *Mein Kampf*: "Today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator by defending myself against the Jew."<sup>13</sup> When he became head of state in 1933 he felt he had to defend himself and the German people against the Satanic Jew, who had no other aim on earth than to destroy the German people. Here, if not earlier, was

seeded the image of Hitler, as prophet-redeemer of the German nation and western civilization, redeemed from the Jew, as world-menace.

Hitler did not arrive at his opinions about Jews without help. We know that early in his career as a politician he came under the influence of the Viennese intellectual Dietrich Eckart, Hitler's mentor in anti-Semitism. Eckart had an enormous ideological influence on Hitler and on the writing of *Mein Kampf*, an influence that was generously acknowledged by its author when he dedicated his book to his comrades killed during the 1923 putsch and to Dietrich Eckart. Eckart's vision was apocalyptic. He believed that, more than striving for domination, the Jew is dedicated to the destruction of Christian civilization.<sup>14</sup> Further, Eckart believed that to prevent the Satanic Jew from achieving his ends, Germany must commit itself to a moral struggle of monumental proportions in rescuing Christian civilization from the power of evil itself.

Elie Wiesel, the most widely read of romantic, mystically-inclined authors, takes the view that the Holocaust is inexplicable and can teach no lessons about the causes of evil among human beings.<sup>15</sup> I used to incline to this view, but the recently published essays of Yehuda Bauer and the books of Saul Friedlander and Norman Cohn have begun to change my thinking. The animus against the Jew did not commence with Hitler and the Nazis, nor with patterns of German anti-Semitism at the turn of the last century. I believe the animus goes back to early Christian times and to the portrayal of the Jew in the Crusades as the Anti-Christ. What produced the image of the Jewish Anti-Christ in the Crusades was the presence of a fanatic, uncontrolled, destructive energy that Cohn dubs "revolutionary millenarianism." Nowhere did this "revolutionary millenarianism" prove more destructive than in the Christian treatment of both Muslims and Jews in the places and times that fell within the scope of the military pilgrimages that comprise the Crusades.

I am beginning to read the evidence of Hitler's Germany in a similar way. It is true that in his book, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, Cohn hurdles centuries to argue the connection between the massacre of Jews in the Crusader Middle Ages and the scientific extermination of Jews under the Nazis in the twentieth century. Yet, any careful examination of the two sets of historical events should convince us that the Holocaust could happen, and did happen, because of the prior historical precedence of the First Crusade. At the center of both events was a revolutionary eschatology, a Manichean-

Gnostic vision of the world divided into good and evil, a division that could only produce apocalyptic destruction.

#### IV

Let's look again at the parallels. At the root of both the Crusades and Nazism was a social myth that had become an effective, convincing, essentially murderous ideology: the Jew as the betrayer of Christ later became the Jew who betrayed the German nation in her hour of need. It was the Crusader masses, the *pauperae*, in their religious hatred who bequeathed to the Nazis the imagery of the Jewish Anti-Christ. Moreover, it was not Hitler's secularity but his squeamishness that accounts for his well-known aversion for butchering Jews as they were butchered in the First Crusade. Hitler said he preferred the elimination of the Jew by more "scientific" means.<sup>16</sup>

Hitler also should not be thought of as some embodiment of the Wagnerian pagan folk hero, a Siegfried who disdained the Christian valuation of the Jew. In fact, Hitler could easily see what was obvious to everybody — one could not advance the racially oriented revolution he was leading if the Jew could evade racial categories by the mere process of seeking Christian baptism. What Hitler and those closest to him were pursuing was a revolutionary reconfiguration of Germany and Europe based on concepts of race and racial purity.

This is a millenarian dream to be sure. And, like all millenarian dreams, ancient or mediaeval or modern, no one thought to ask what will be the new relationships, the new arrangement of life once Satan is gone, once the blessed Saints come fully to power? The Nazi sense of the millennium was conveyed by that protean expression, the "Thousand Years Reich." No one asked what would be the state of things a hundred years into the "Thousand Years Reich." Would the German economy always remain sound? Would there not be the need of a Jew like Walter Rathenau to pull a purely Aryan Germany out of economic recession? Would a purely Aryan German society remain interesting and creative? Could it always remain so without its non-Aryan writers, actors, violinists? Would not even the most ideological of Nazis not begin to miss the cultural contributions of the non-Aryans?

If one examines carefully the anti-Jewish measures taken in Germany from 1933 until the invasion of Poland on the first day of September, 1939,

one cannot escape the feeling that Germany was swept up in a gigantic witch hunt. The witch hunt was led or orchestrated by no more than a few hundred ideologically-possessed Nazis bent on eradicating German society of the never more than 1% (or 550,000) German-Jewish inhabitants. The overwhelming numbers of German citizens were not members of the Nazi party and were indifferent to anti-Jewish measures. Until the war reached German soil, the German masses viewed the Nazi leadership as a wind that would pass over the country. They believed that changing times would produce a new, more stable and reputable government.

One must doubt that the German people ever understood the millenarian dreams and ambitions of the Nazis. It is doubtful they recognized Nazi millenarianism as the collective and mindlessly destructive infantilism it was, even when that infantilism, in its earlier medieval expression, formed a part of Germany's own history. The Germans, however, were willing to go along with this infantilism because the Nazi party, headed by Hitler, legally gained office, and because Hitler, as head of state, kept his campaign promise of putting people back to work and revitalizing the economy. Because of that achievement, the mildly disagreeable matter of Nazi hostility toward the Jews could be overlooked.

Did the hard-core Nazis, beginning with Hitler, actually believe in their own millenarian fantasies about the Jewish Satan and the international Jewish conspiracy as set forth by the Czarist forgery, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, translated and published in Germany in 1920 — a pamphlet that sold 100,000 copies in its first printing? The question makes me hesitate to break ranks with the functionalist historians of the Holocaust who, by and large, take the view that Hitler's anti-Semitism was essentially pragmatic or political.<sup>17</sup> Certainly Hitler used anti-Semitism in his speeches to advance his party and his career and, equally true, that he ordered or authorized or condoned the program of extermination, including earlier *Einsatzgruppen* mass shootings, because Germany's early sweep through the U.S.S.R. resulted in the capture of great numbers of unwanted Jews seen as a burden to be removed. The Wannsee conference of January, 1942, was convened by Reinhard Heydrich to solve the problem of these unwanted Jews under Germany's control.

These are facts to be sure. But, for me, the more persuasive framework for interpreting them is not the functionalist but the intentionalist thesis, *i.e.*, the thesis that attributes a Jew-hating mentality to Hitler, a

mentality that included all his millenarian fantasies and delusions. In this regard, it is illuminating to mention recollections of Hitler recorded by the British Ambassador to Germany and by the American Consul General in Berlin during the Hitler period.

The British Ambassador, Sir Horace Rumhold, said of Hitler, "Herr Hitler is himself responsible for the anti-Jewish policy of the German government and it would be a mistake to believe that it is the policy of his wilder men whom he has difficulty controlling. Anybody who has had the opportunity of listening to his remarks on Jews could not have failed...to realize that he is a fanatic on the subject."<sup>18</sup>

The American diplomat, George S. Messersmith, communicating to Secretary of State Cordell Hull on November 1, 1933 said, "...I have already pointed out in previous dispatches and again in this one, Mr. Hitler himself is implacable and...is the real head of the anti-Jewish movement. He can be reasonable on a number of subjects but on this he can only be passionate and prejudiced."<sup>19</sup>

Fanatic, passionate, prejudiced on the subject of Jews; it is precisely these emotions that cannot be explained, says the historian John Lukacs in his incisive book about Hitler. Hitler's hostility towards Jews remains a mystery despite the psychologists' speculations that Hitler throughout his life hated the thing he most feared in himself: that he might be partly Jewish through his paternal grandfather.<sup>20</sup> Lukacs proposes that to correctly understand Hitler's fear we must go beyond conventional anti-Semitic categories and speak of Hitler's paranoia about Jews, his "Judeophobia," in Lukacs' language. Lukacs writes that "there is no evidence that [Hitler's] often-stated beliefs — that by persecuting the Jews he was acting as an instrument of God, and that the war had been forced on him by the Jews — were meant for public consumption only."<sup>21</sup>

That Hitler was carrying out a deadly millenarian fantasy about the Jews is argued by the perceptive Swiss historian Philippe Burrin who says:

Around the middle of September 1941, when he decided to kill the Jews, he certainly did not think defeat was inevitable. But he must have assuredly felt that it would take a great deal of luck in the future for him to win; and he saw clearly the price he would have to pay to avoid defeat. The extermination of the Jews, then, was at once a propitiatory act and an act of vengeance. By putting to death



those thought of as his archetypal enemies — little did it matter to his obsessed mind that these were powerless and unarmed civilians — he was demonstrating his will to the end by means of the sacrificial death of Jews, he was fanatically steeling himself to achieve victory to fight on to annihilation. At the same time, and above all, he was expiating German spilled blood, and avenging beforehand a possible defeat. He would conduct this exercise as it turned out, with mounting determination as the situation worsened and as he advanced toward an apocalyptic end.<sup>22</sup>

It is precisely because Hitler's vision of Jews, and the destruction of Jews, was apocalyptic that Saul Friedlander proposes that we revise our thinking about anti-Semitism to include a category he calls "redemptive anti-Semitism." "Redemptive anti-Semitism" fuses both racial anti-Semitism and religious anti-Semitism as they must be fused if we are to take better account of Nazi hostility towards Jews. It is true Hitler spoke of a non-religious, more scientific, or "rational" way of ridding Germany of the Jews. But, what that came down to was a reversion to the older medieval anti-Jewish animus, an animus fused with pseudo-scientific language about race and racial inferiority/superiority. In other words, what it came down to was "redemptive anti-Semitism."

Friedlander's definition of "redemptive anti-Semitism," along with the accounts of Lukacs and Burrin, offer the best insight into Hitler's Judeophobia. Friedlander writes:

[The Jew] in Hitler's historical description was dehistoricized and transformed into an abstract principle of evil that confronted a no less meta-historical counterpart just as immutable in its nature and role throughout time — the Aryan race. Whereas Marxism stressed the conflict of changing historical forces, Nazism and particularly Hitler's worldview considered history as the confrontation of an immutable good and an immutable evil. The outcome could only be envisioned in religious terms, perdition or redemption.<sup>23</sup>

The most eloquent and incisive point about the Nazi millenarian vision is made by Professor Robert Elwood. His statement deserves to be quoted in full.

By its very nature, a millennial movement is like placing a bet for the highest possible stakes against the game of history. The movement is wagering that history's ordinary desultory flow can be stopped dead, and through a convulsive religious/revolutionary act the river of destiny raised into a high sparkling-pure stream running under divine power, never again subject to the downward pull of gravity. If the wager fails and normal time again returns, then all is lost and the movement is discredited in most eyes. To keep the wager going, therefore, all the prophet's resources must be continually placed on the table: money, person, armaments, the energies of sacred wars, even human sacrifice. The ultimate gamble requires the ultimate in commitment. In the end the bet can prevail only if spirit can prove itself truly superior in historical time to the way of all flesh, if grace can be shown greater than gravity in our time and space, for millennium means this worldly, not other-worldly, salvation. Therefore, the stakes call for war to make millennialist will triumph even if, by the laws of the flesh, the millennium seems likely to lose on the field of battle; only thus can the power of spirit in this historical moment be tested. The Nazis gambled everything because they could do no other in the light of their original premises about the superiority of their race, their leader, their community, and their spirit; and they lost.<sup>24</sup>

I add, only, that the infantilism of the Nazi Vision of Utopia also shows-up in the political will of the German people. When the Nazis decided to sell the dream of utopia, the German people were willing and prepared to buy that dream.

Notes

1. Salo Baron, cited from Yisrael Gutman, "On the Character of Nazi Antisemitism," *Antisemitism Through the Ages*, Shmuel Almog, ed. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), p. 354.
2. Cited from *Hitler's Secret Conversations, 1941-1944*, Hugh R. Trevor Roper, ed. (New York, 1972).
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8. Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), Introduction, Cohn's concluding remarks, explicitly connecting Nazism to millenarianism, is the subject of a book-length study by David Rhodes, *The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Movement* (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press 1996). Also for an excellent summary of the thesis inspired by Cohn and developed by Rhodes see Robert Elwood, "Nazism as a Millennialist Movement," *Millennialism, Persecution and Violence*, Catherine Wessinger, ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 241-260.
9. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (2001). Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. I (1997). John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (1997). Uriel Tal, *Christians and Jews in Germany: Religion and Politics and Ideology in the Second Reich, 1870-1914* (1969).
10. "Hitler may have appeared more than a little ridiculous to outside observers, but he established a potent bond with the German masses through the charm of which he was capable and his impassioned ways." Robert Elwood, op. cit., Catherine Wessinger, op. cit., p. 245.

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12. Cohn, op. cit., p. 21.
13. Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, cited from Saul Friedlander, op. cit., p. 98.
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15. See Elie Wiesel, “Art and Culture After the Holocaust,” *Cross Currents*, vol. XXVI No. 3 (Fall, 1976), p. 265.
16. Lukacs, op. cit., p. 184.
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## *Explaining the Unexplainable*

Yehuda Bauer's collected essays, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, compels us to think that explaining the Holocaust is essentially, before anything else, an historical event, to be approached through the techniques of historical research and writing.<sup>1</sup> This means that the Holocaust writings of novelists, psychologists, philosophers, theologians should follow the findings of the historians, not precede them nor serve in their place under the faulty assumption that the Holocaust, albeit an event of fathomless evil, is mysterious and inexplicable. However, those who stress the unexplainable nature of the Holocaust will also say, that while the Nazi destruction of European Jewry can be described (Where?, What?, When?, and How?) an explanation of that event (answering the question of Why?) falls beyond our understanding.

In the forefront of those who take the view that the Holocaust is unexplainable is the writer and concentration camp survivor, Elie Wiesel. For years I was influenced by the novels and essays of Wiesel to think that a crime so massive in evil, so irrational in motive, so awesome and ugly in consequences is a crime both mysterious and incomprehensible.<sup>2</sup> I thought that such an event had nothing to teach us, nothing we could understand and use in our lives.

While I continue to think that, at its center, the Holocaust, particularly the motives of the perpetrators, remains enigmatic and raises more questions than are answered, the reading of Yehuda Bauer's essays have caused me to temper my views. Bauer's essays convince me that to assert an enigma without qualification, without making a conscientious effort to do the research and read the seminal studies, is to surrender to a needlessly romantic and, finally, wrong-headed concession to evil's inherent darkness. Evil, however dark, mysterious, impenetrable, is evil *humanly* experienced. When evil is seen or read about, evil is felt, touched, grasped. Is it not true, then, that evil cannot not lie beyond human understanding?

It is important to add that excessive stress on the mystical and romantic removes the physical event of the Holocaust from the history of place and

time to the distant realms of the spiritual. This is to de-historicize the Holocaust. And, de-historicizing the Holocaust has to be counted as a victory for the perpetrators, a defeat for the victims.

Bauer's arguments have persuaded me that the Holocaust is an explicable event. If the Holocaust were totally inexplicable, then it would lie outside history, impervious to rational discourse. This also means that the attribution of absolute uniqueness to the Holocaust (so often heard among Holocaust scholars) leads to trivialization. This does not preclude comparing the genocide of European Jews to other Jews, or other massacres, other slaughters, etc. Such comparison is a rational act seeking the intelligible pattern in the empirical data of human mass murder. It does not at all preclude the judgment that, on a comparative basis, the particular event of the Nazi genocide of Europe's Jews may indeed be "unique."<sup>3</sup>

Bauer states that the basis of intelligible historical writing is the "comparability of human experience." There are recurring, recognizable patterns in the passing events of history that we can study and understand. With respect to the Holocaust this "comparability" is a guide to investigation and knowledge. To suppose otherwise is to replace history with chaos, where nothing is explicable and rationally discussible. Since the Holocaust is explicable, no good is accomplished by referring to it as mysterious, as containing religious elements of transcendence. "If we argue like that," says Bauer, "we may be guilty of transforming the murder of children into some sort of metaphysical gibberish we blasphemously call transcendence."<sup>4</sup>

Another uncritical assumption influencing my thinking arose in how I explained to my students the causes of the Holocaust. For many years I was led by Hannah Arendt's book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, to believe that the Holocaust could be explained by the personality of Eichmann himself.<sup>5</sup> Of course, there is much truth in Arendt's description of Eichmann as the total bureaucrat/functionary, who had no particular hatred of Jews and who was willing to organize the deportation of Jews to their deaths out of a wish to obey orders, do his job, advance in rank. But, bureaucracy alone or the "banality of evil," to use Arendt's fertile metaphor, cannot explain the Holocaust.

My own uncritical use of Arendt's account tended to down-play the role of historic German disfavor of Jews in seeding the ground for the eventual appearance of a specific racial/biological form of anti-Semitic ideology that captured the German public, and made possible the Holocaust. Bauer's

essays made me realize that such an ideology, and the genocidal policy that accompanied it, must be explained. We can find that explanation not in German history, culture or tradition, as such, but only in the emergence of the Nazi party elite and its extraordinary successes with the German people militarily, politically, and socially. Hitler and his fellow Nazis won thousands of the most educated of Germany's society to their side: professors, university students, and professionals, including clergy, doctors, military officers, engineers, attorneys, judges.

Today, in my classes on the Holocaust, I stress the indispensable roles played by the combination of anti-Semitic ideology and the Nazi elite. It is important to emphasize that anti-Semitism alone will not explain the cause(s) of the Holocaust; not, at any rate, the historic anti-Semitism of the German people, which was "moderate," (Bauer's word) when compared with Russia and Rumania where there were longer histories of virulent anti-Semitism.

The Holocaust was conceived, planned, and executed in Germany, however, and nowhere else. How does one explain that? Bauer answers by pointing to a national consensus produced by the racial ideology of a Nazi elite, popularly supported by intellectuals, professionals, students, the middle class, and others. Without the support of the elite, the gray mass of ordinary German people, the "simpler folk" (Bauer, p. 47), would not have been persuaded to overcome their scruples and join collectively in government policies that began with discrimination and escalated to genocide, resulting in the destruction of one-third of Europe's Jews. Bauer writes:

In a society that had willingly accepted the absolute leadership of a ruling elite and especially of its head, the intelligentsia became the crucial transmitting agent of murderous orders. If the people with social and intellectual status led the way and were involved in initiating new ways of executing orders more efficiently, it became very easy to recruit ordinary murderers from the lowest ranks of society — in so far as the intelligentsia did not do the murdering themselves.<sup>6</sup>

The events leading to the Holocaust did not follow a deterministic line to a certain conclusion. At first the Nazis sought to rid their society of Jews through forced emigration. The Nuremberg laws stripping Jews of civil rights were promulgated in September, 1935. The event of *Kristallnacht*,

which followed three years later in November, 1938, was a violent reminder that Jews had no place in Germany under the Nazi government. The evolution that moved Nazi thinking about Jews from deportation to mass murder came about through the circumstances of, but not because of, war. It is true that the sheer number of Jews that fell under Nazi control through the invasion of Poland and later of Russia posed a problem, whose solution became the "final solution," the infamous *endlösung*. Consistent with Nazi anti-Semitic ideology, Germany was now prepared to rid itself of all Jews in its control through mass murder. This event underwent several stages (again following no single determined, straight line), beginning with the actions of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing squads that accompanied the *Wehrmacht* upon the invasion of the USSR in June, 1941. While no written order from Hitler exists authorizing the mass murder of Jews, an oral instruction to that effect was probably given in about March, 1941.<sup>7</sup>

As Bauer has disabused me of uncritically held assumptions about the Holocaust, so he has confirmed me in my thinking that demonism will not explain the actions of thousands who actively participated in the destruction machine and the millions of by-standers who remained passive as the machine went into operation. But, the equally important truth is that the people who devised plans, ran trains, guarded camps, operated death machines were ordinary human beings, not sadists, not madmen. The German people were born of human mothers and fathers who, like Eichmann, had no particular hatred of Jews. They saw the removal of Jews from their society, not as evil but as a patriotic act of benefit to Germany, and to Europe. There is a lesson here. What we ought to understand is that the modern face of evil is ordinary, without horns, not satanic or Mephistophelian. As Bauer reminds us, "...once the Fuhrer expressed a desire and once an enthusiastic class of educated people backed it, the simpler folk who did the shooting and beating and child murdering were easily found."<sup>8</sup>

The argument that individual resistance against the Nazi regime was futile in the face of overwhelming opposition is shown by Bauer to be a myth. The evidence shows that Nazis were actually sensitive to public opinion within Germany and internationally. For example, German women demonstrated, with success, for the return of their Jewish husbands from prison. Also, the public clamor against the murderous euthanasia program caused such trouble that the government continued it only in secret. Further, public reaction against a government order to remove crucifixes in Ger-



man hospitals and schools was rescinded after Catholics protested. It is also known that, during wartime, not a single soldier was punished for refusing orders to engage in murderous acts against Jews. What these cases show is that the Nazi government was well aware that its anti-Jewish policies were extreme and could stigmatize Germany if public criticisms were not heeded. The absence of widespread criticism played a large role in confirming Nazi belief that the German people were indifferent to what happened to Jews.

For those who resist the term “Holocaust” and rely upon the general application of the word “genocide,” Bauer provides a useful differentiation between the two words. The word “genocide,” he argues, is applicable in referring to the practice of mass murder of a portion of an ethnic group or nation. The word “Holocaust” ought to be reserved for referring to the intended destruction of all World Jewry. He makes this distinction because the Holocaust is unprecedented in its totality. The Nazis not only built on centuries of Christian hostility towards Jews, they went considerably further by seeking to murder every Jew who came within reach. The Nazi target was all people who had at least three Jewish grandparents. The Nazis made no secret of their intention to eliminate every Jew in the world.

In the past the Christian religion had demanded that Jews convert to the church. Jews might be punished for not converting, as in the Inquisition. The Church, however, drew the line at murder, which was viewed as a mortal sin. The Nazis exceeded traditional Christian anti-Judaic disdain by assaulting the very religious and moral values of Christianity, which were correctly seen (by the Nazis themselves) to lie in Judaism. Hitler, who believed he was doing the Lord’s work in killing Jews, would have hunted down every Jew in the world had he won the war.

Bauer argues that the only way to explain this extraordinary animus against Jews is to recognize the irrational fear that the Nazi leadership bore towards Jews. The fear was fed by two sources of energy. From Hitler down the Nazis were convinced that the Jews were a supremely powerful people bent on taking over the world. The late nineteenth-century Czarist police forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was widely read and believed in Germany, beginning with Hitler. The second source was the belief that Jews were a kind of biological virus infecting the body of the German people and that, unless that virus were removed, the German people would suffer irreparable harm. Thus, a murderous anti-Semitic ideology was justified on the basis of patriotism. Anti-Semitism was seen, to use Saul

Friedlander's word, as "redemptive."<sup>9</sup> The Nazis persuaded thousands of their fellow Germans to believe that to rid the world of Jews would bring about the salvation of Germany. Given the mind-set that the removal of Jews from Europe and potentially from the world would create utopia, it was possible to convince a majority of Germans that anti-Jewish policies from the Nuremberg laws to *endlösung*, the final solution, were necessary.

Bauer's own understanding of the origins of the Holocaust is reinforced by a critical examination of the strengths and weaknesses of explanations provided by several prominent scholars. One of the most significant of these explanations is the one known as functionalism. As the word suggests, functionalism is prepared to explain the causes of the Holocaust through sociological or demographic factors such as modernity, bureaucracy, the need for *lebensraum*, room to grow. In other words, pragmatic considerations in solving problems account for the destruction of European Jewry. Functionalist historians will explain the murderous policies of the Nazis by referring to the efforts of bureaucrats, economists, and engineers to solve problems created by overcrowded ghettos, and by the need for additional territory to resettle ethnic Germans gained in the German military advance into Russia.

The functionalist school of interpreting the Holocaust is represented by Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and two contemporary German historians, Jeffrey Herf and Goetz Aly.<sup>10</sup> They share the view that what explains the Holocaust is not anti-Semitism but bureaucracy. Bauer quotes Bauman: "...physical extermination as the right means of 'removing' [Jews] was a product of routine, bureaucratic procedures."<sup>11</sup>

Initially, I was drawn to the functionalist account of the Holocaust because it helped explain what, for me, were two important facts: first, anti-Jewish policies began not with mass murder but with the effort to force Jews out of Germany and second, the actual mass extermination of Jews through the mobile killing squads (*Einsatzgruppen*) did not commence until the invasion of the U.S.S.R, in June, 1941, when Nazis were confronted by millions of unwanted Jews. In both cases I recognized the bureaucrats' problem of "excess population." At the same time I did not attach sufficient importance to the force of anti-Semitic ideology in Nazi thinking. Until studying Bauer's book I thought that functionalism, which I took to be a detached, non-judgmental analysis of facts, adequately explained the Nazi extermination policy. In this I was mistaken.

What I and other functionalists had never stopped to ask was the question of motivation. What was the actual end to which German organizational and technical energies were put? Why was the bureaucracy employed in mass murder? These are large questions. After all, there is nothing inherently evil in an organized system that relies on clerks, chemists, bankers, engineers, and train conductors. The only question is the purpose and goal. As Raul Hilberg has noted, the techniques for transporting Jews to the death camps by train were adapted from the same plans to transport German school children to summer vacation camps.

Bauer raises a set of questions that helped me reassess my own thinking about functionalism. How is it that a genocidal policy did not develop in Britain and the U.S., which were exemplars of modernism? Why did fascist Italy, which was as bureaucratic as Germany, not promote genocide? And, how is that Imperial Japan, Germany's wartime ally, no stranger to bureaucracy, social organization, and technical skills, did nothing to endanger Jews, who found refuge in Japanese-occupied China.

Bauer persuades us that in explaining the Holocaust we must look beyond modernity and bureaucracy — beyond even fascism itself. Had the Nazi regime been only an Italian-style of fascism, the Holocaust as we know it might never have occurred. Those functionalists, who want to ignore anti-Semitic ideology and explain the Holocaust on purely pragmatic/bureaucratic grounds, must also explain why the Nazis went to the trouble of rounding-up, and deporting to their deaths, Jews from as far away as the Greek islands of Rhodes and Corfu.

Bauer also counters the functionalist assumption that Jews were led silently like sheep, without fuss, to the slaughter. Until reading Bauer's book, I shared the misconception of an efficient Nazi killing machine reliant on a host of compliant Jewish councils (*Judenräte*). Evidence proves otherwise. Facts show that the Jews were not so passive; the killing machine was not efficient; the Jewish Councils proved not so compliant. In the last analysis, functionalism can account for some of the organizational methods and techniques used by Nazis, but these factors do not explain how a Hitler regime arose in Germany and decided to murder the Jews. Only a murderous anti-Semitic ideology, building on the "moderate anti-Semitism" of the German public, can do that.

It would seem that Bauer's stress on anti-Semitic ideology would make him an intellectual ally of Harvard University historian Daniel Goldhagen,

whose book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, strongly emphasizes anti-Semitic ideology in explaining the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> However, while Goldhagen's book caused a stir both in popular and intellectual circles, and brought attention to the indispensable role played by anti-Semitic thinking in the murder of Jews, Goldhagen makes his points by way of an unproved, sensationalistic thesis about a supposed trait in the German cultural character, dubbed by him "eliminationist anti-semitism." The Harvard historian wants to convince his readers that before the Nazis came to power this "eliminationist antisemitism" took different forms, including pressure to force Jews to assimilate or to convert to Christianity.

In reaction to Goldhagen, Bauer concedes that a "moderate" form of anti-Semitism always existed among a great many Germans. Jews were not popular among non-Jewish Germans; they were considered strange and, despite their own self-perceptions, were not regarded by their fellow Germans as authentically German. But the idea of an "eliminationist antisemitism" in German culture is illogical, argues Bauer. For one thing assimilation, or the pressure to change one's identity, is hardly the same thing as murder. Also, the fact that many Jews assimilated in German culture may provide evidence not of anti-Semitism, but of opportunities in business and the professions open to Jews following the emancipation of Jews in pre-Nazi Germany. In addition, that 50,000 Jews intermarried with non-Jews is a fact challenging the picture of a society plagued with "eliminationist antisemitism."

Other facts also speak against "eliminationist antisemitism." In the last free election of 1932 the Germans voted heavily for non-anti-Semitic parties. In the same year, the rabidly anti-Semitic Nazi party actually lost 2 million votes and 34 seats in the Bundestag. Until the compromising of the military in the Hitler years, the army was known to have an exemplary record in the treatment of Jews. Moreover, Goldhagen weakens his thesis about "eliminationist antisemitism" by ignoring the all-important political, social, and economic developments in pre-Nazi Germany in relation to other European states.

Yet, it is certainly true that Germany continued to evolve throughout the Nazi period, so that by 1941–1942 Germany was engaged in the mass murder of Jews. What explains the evolution? The answer, says Bauer, is not "eliminationist antisemitism" but the emergence of a victorious Nazi

elite able to capitalize on the consensus of moderate anti-Semitism among the German people. Thus, where Goldhagen advances a simplistic thesis about anti-Semitism ingrained among ordinary Germans, Bauer argues a more complicated process that links together the critical roles played by the Nazi elite, ideology, the intellectuals, the unpopularity of Jews among the German masses, and a national consensus.

Reflecting on this linkage, Bauer offers an important generalization about ideology, intellectuals, and genocide. "... when an intellectual elite or pseudo-intellectual elite with a genocidal program ... achieves power in a crisis-ridden society for economic, social, and political reasons that have nothing to do with the genocidal program, then if that elite can draw the intellectuals to its side, genocide will result."<sup>14</sup>

Was there any Jewish resistance to Nazi tyranny? The answer is, more than one thought. I had pretty much accepted the view promoted by both Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt that the Holocaust shows centuries of Diaspora existence in self-enclosed ghettos had created a passive people, overly reliant on their leaders, a people that had largely given-up their instinct for self-defense. Yet, this was not so. Contrary to the image of sheep lead to the slaughter, Bauer persuades me that there was a considerable amount of *amidah*, or "standing up" to the oppressor.

The resistance took many forms: the smuggling of food to keep people alive; witnessing by writing down what was happening; reciting poetry from memory; and, in the concentration camps, staging plays, drawing pictures, educating children, caring for orphans, operating a press in three languages. In all these quiet but defiant ways *amidah* was shown, spirit kept alive.

Nor was *amidah* entirely passive. There were numerous instances of violent Jewish opposition to Nazism. In the forests of Eastern Poland, Belarus, and Northern Ukraine some 30,000 Jews fought Germans with inadequate weapons. There was armed rebellion in Warsaw, and there were rebellions in other East European towns. And, something else to consider: as Hilberg contends, if Jews had lost their power of communal self-defense over the centuries, how do we explain that in 1948, less than a half-dozen years from the death camps, Jews miraculously regained their human power by establishing and militarily defending a Jewish state?<sup>15</sup>

Raul Hilberg takes the view that Jews became part of the Nazi machinery of death the moment they agreed to act as *Judenräte*, but should not be

judged morally as collaborators with the enemy because “they were *not* the willful accomplices of the Germans.”<sup>16</sup> This is true. Bauer, however, introduces a fresh perspective. His reasoned analysis of the *Judenräte* has forced me to rethink this terrible chapter in Jewish history. Where Hilberg is definite in his judgment, Bauer finds a vastly more complex and ambiguous moral dilemma posed by the *Judenräte*. In his view, historical judgments must include motivations as well as causes and consequences. What may have made people do what they did cannot be ignored if we are to be fair to the actual context of life in which human beings were forced to make their own agonizing decisions.

A case in point is that of Chaim Rumkowski, the Jewish official who became the virtual dictator of the Lodz ghetto. As Bauer tells the story, none should doubt that Rumkowski was a morally compromised collaborator of the Nazis, even to the extent of personally selecting Jewish men, women, and children for deportation to the death camps. The inmates of the Lodz ghetto who survived did so because Jewish slave labor was productive of goods needed by the German military. It also must be said that largely because of Rumkowski the Lodz ghetto remained intact and its inmates survived until the very last stages of the war. The Lodz ghetto was dismantled only when the Russian army was approaching. The order came from Berlin to liquidate the ghetto. Immediately after that thousands were gassed at Chelmno and others were sent as slave labor to Auschwitz. The Red Army arrived too late for these last events to be averted.

Here Bauer raises the issue that if the Russian army had arrived a few days earlier to liberate the Jews from the Lodz ghetto, one Chaim Rumkowski might have entered history as the person who made the survival of the Lodz ghetto possible. If this had happened the shame attached to the name of Rumkowski, the Jew who selected other Jews for death, might well have been replaced by plaques honoring his memory. The line separating shame and honor in all matters touching the Holocaust is a thin one. There is terrible ambiguity on the part of historians, teachers, readers, Jews and non-Jews — all those who did not personally experience the same life-and-death decisions — in reaching any judgment about the *Judenräte*.

“The theology of the Holocaust is fascinating, but it is a dead end,”<sup>17</sup> writes Bauer, when he deliberately passes over the post-Holocaust theology of such notable Jewish theologians as Arthur Cohen, Emil Fackenheim, Pinchas Peli, Richard Rubenstein, and Eliezer Berkovitz. Bauer shows little

interest in the various intellectual stratagems they employ to define the existence or meaning of God for Jews in a post-Holocaust world. It is in discussing these and other theological reactions to the Holocaust that Bauer expresses his impatience with speculations about God, speculations that depart from historical fact.

For Bauer, more important than the arguments of theologians are the stated beliefs and opinions of orthodox rabbis. He himself an Israeli, Bauer knows that in a country where the only officially recognized Judaism is orthodoxy, whose pronouncements are heard and heeded by the majority of the population not explicitly secular. Nothing more dramatizes the futility of speculating about God and the Holocaust than the expressed beliefs of orthodox and *haredi* (ultra-orthodox) religious thinkers.\_

Bauer finds these arguments to be circular, contradictory, even offensive to moral sensibility. He makes specific reference to such influential religious authorities as Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmarer Rebbe; Chief Rabbi of Palestine, Yitzhak Halevi Herzog; the Chassidic Rabbi of Piacenza, Kalman Klonymus Shapira; the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Shneur Zalman of Lady; and the late Menachem Mendel Schneersohn, who (until his recent death) was regarded by his followers as the Messiah.

While they may disagree over details, the orthodox and ultra-orthodox rabbis are united in their reactions to the Holocaust. Bauer finds two main responses to the Holocaust offensive. The first is the argument dramatized by Job's final confession before the majesty and might of God: "We are too puny" to fathom the mind and will of the creator. The second argument is drawn from the Hebrew prophets, who struggled to explain how the God of Israel could allow the disasters that befell his people. The answer of the prophets was *mipnei kha'teinu*, "because of our sins." Just as God had used Nebuchadnezzar as a rod to punish Israel for her sins, so some orthodox rabbis (following the prophets) are prepared to argue that God used Hitler as his "rod" to punish the Jewish people with the Holocaust. The argument became even more offensive when Lubavitcher Rebbe Schneersohn employed a grotesque metaphor: the Holocaust can be likened to the cutting away of a poisoned limb of the body of the Jewish people, a limb poisoned by sinful infractions of the ritual law (*Halacha*).

The pattern of orthodox thinking is such that Job's argument of "we are too puny" is never allowed to suffice. If it were, one would be left with the weak but plausible argument that the existence of evil is an

impenetrable mystery. But orthodox thinkers will not leave it there. They seem to want to justify God in the presence of the Holocaust. They are prepared to argue that it was the sins of the Jewish people that brought forth the divine punishment in the form of millions of dead, including more than a million Jewish children. The moral absurdity of this response lies in the fact that it was not secularized, *Halachic*-denying Jews murdered in the Holocaust. The overwhelming majority murdered were the ritually observant Jews of Poland and Russia. One absurdity then leads to another: it is also true that the highest percentage of Jews to evade the Nazi destruction were from Germany, Austria, and France, countries in which Jewish ritual tradition was least observed.

In Bauer's opinion the explanation for these absurdities is a tendency in orthodoxy to take a magical view of ritual in connection to God. Bauer writes:

The magic explanation [of ritual] returns power to the persecuted group: They are actually more powerful than their persecutors because they can change history by their behavior, and they know perfectly well what the behavior desired by God is. Magic is real, prevents despair and enables the minority — the Jews in this case — to overcome disasters.<sup>18</sup>

The argument of "free will" is also used by orthodox thinkers. This argument assumes there is a God who wants to be loved freely. To that end he has given human beings freedom of choice between good and evil. From a Jewish orthodox point of view what is good is to obey the 613 commandments of Jewish law, the *Halacha*, but we should not be surprised if human beings use their freedom to choose evil. The Nazis also had freedom of choice and they chose evil. Thus, the dilemma confronting orthodox thinkers is how to make moral sense of a God who is believed to be both the author of freedom-for-evil, as well as of freedom-for-good.

Another argument (reminiscent of medieval Catholic theology) is that evil, as well as good, comes from God. Evil, then, is also a part of God, which means that evil is only *seemingly* bad. Evil will ultimately lead to good. Yet another argument is that evil is allowed to enter the world because God has chosen to temporarily hide his face from the world. One recalls this argument as Martin Buber's explanation of God vis-à-vis great evil was borrowed from the Prophets.<sup>19</sup> That this argument virtually makes



God an accomplice of evil is not something that seems to disturb the orthodox or ultra-orthodox.

In struggling with these dilemmas orthodox and ultra-orthodox thinkers will turn away from the vexing problems of belief in favor of the certainties of ritual practice. Bauer writes that "In the end for traditional Judaism, belief in God is self-understood, but is of less importance than the observance of the commandments (*mitzvot*). What is of importance is what one does, not what one believes, what one declares one believes *in* is even less important."<sup>20</sup> In this regard, Bauer asks a question that orthodox rabbis refuse to ask: What is the point of observing the commandments if the commandments lack the power of God and are only relevant from a human point of view?

Perhaps the exception in orthodox thinking is Rabbi Irving Yitz Greenberg, whom Bauer calls "a great contemporary Jewish thinker." Greenberg confronts the dilemma that if God is just and all-powerful, then the Holocaust is unexplainable. Greenberg's strategy at this point is to deny the all-powerfulness of God. Thus, Greenberg rescues the Jewish God of justice and compassion and declares that God could not save the Jews because he is not, or is no longer, all-powerful. The problem with this explanation, says Bauer, is that if God is weak, who then needs God in moments of crisis and danger?

Nevertheless, Bauer finds that Greenberg's is a lonely voice in the orthodox world. He (Greenberg) expresses his own independence of mind by asserting the brokenness of the world, and of Judaism and Christianity in a post-Holocaust world. Greenberg's is indeed a lonely voice in asserting the need for openness in such a world. And this openness, in a post-Holocaust world, imposes on Jews the task (reminiscent of kabbalistic wisdom) to "gather the pieces of light from the hard crust of the material world and reconstruct a meaningful world."<sup>21</sup>

In sharp contrast to theological speculations about God and resorting to magical thinking, Bauer seems to identify himself with the words of the rabbinical sage, Elisha ben Avuya (called Acher or "the Other"). Acher, who well-understood Jewish law and ritual, found no sin in asserting that before the facts of great evil we must conclude *Leit Din Veit Dayan*, "There is no Law and there is no Judge." This atheistic-sounding statement implies that, with regard to the Holocaust, humans alone are to be blamed. Following Acher, Bauer would have to conclude (as I am persuaded to conclude)

that at every moment, in every way, humans alone are responsible for what they do to each other.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

1. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). For a useful summary of Bauer's views on explaining the Holocaust see Yehuda Bauer, "Explaining the Holocaust," *History, Religion and Meaning: American Reflections on the Holocaust*, Julius Simon, ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp. 39–49.
2. Wiesel stresses the inexplicable mystery of the Holocaust in his early writings, especially *Night*, *The Town Beyond the Wall*, *Legends of Our Time*, and *Gates of the Forest*. His clearest expression of this theme is to be found in the article, "Art and Culture After the Holocaust." *Cross Currents*, XXVI, no. 3 (Fall, 1976), pp. 257–67.
3. Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
4. Bauer, "Explaining the Holocaust," op. cit., p. 41.
5. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Viking Press: New York, 1961).
6. Bauer, "Explaining the Holocaust," op. cit., p. 47.
7. See John Lukacs, *The Hitler of History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), pp. 178, 188, and Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. I (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), especially pp. 73–112.
8. Bauer "Explaining the Holocaust," op. cit., p. 47.
9. Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, op. cit., pp. 86–7.
10. Important works of the Functionalist school of interpreting the Holocaust are: Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, U.K., 1989); Geoffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and Goetz Ally and Suzanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*, (Hamburg: Hoffman and Campe, 1995).
11. Zygmunt Bauman, *ibid.*, cited in Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., pp. 70, 80.
12. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1961), cited in Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 29.
13. Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).
14. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 104.
15. Hilberg takes this view in his magnum opus, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, op. cit., as discussed by Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 142.
16. Cited in Bauer's *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 128. See also Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry*, op. cit. For a detailed analysis of the *Judenräte* see Hilberg's article, "The Ghetto as a Form of Government," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (July, 1980), vol. 450, pp. 98–112.

17. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 212.
18. Ibid., p. 193.
19. See Martin Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957).
20. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, op. cit., p. 188.
21. Ibid., p. 192.
22. Ibid., p. 200.

## Part Four

Judaism, Christianity, and the Holocaust:  
Theological Responses to Evil



*Jewish Responses to the Holocaust:  
There is No Law and There is No Judge?*

I

After witnessing the cruelty committed by humans against each other, the Rabbinic sage Elisha ben Abuya, regretfully concluded: There is no Law and there is no Judge: *Leit Din Veleit Dayan*. Thereafter Elisha's fellow rabbis, recognizing the skeptical turn of his thought, dubbed him, *Acher*, "the Other." The question before us is this: after having fully informed ourselves about the Nazi destruction of European Jewry, should we not also conclude with Rabbi Elisha, "There is no Law and there is no Judge?" The purpose of this chapter is to answer Elisha's question.<sup>1</sup>

As we contemplate the question consider that in the Holocaust a million and a half children were deliberately murdered for the mere fact that they were Jewish children. Add to that number four to five million Jewish parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and countless other unnamed individuals — all murdered because of Jewish ancestry. And further, add one million Roma and Sinta gypsies, adults and children, for the mere fact that they were gypsies. To read of such a stupendous act of human annihilation is to be rendered speechless, mute before fact, as if staring into a gigantic hole in the earth, wondering how it got there, and why. Those with the patience and stomach to learn of the facts find themselves less of afraid of questions than of answers. Our worse fear is that the wholesale murder of children might be "understood."<sup>2</sup>

The late Jewish scholar, Arthur A. Cohen, borrowed a word from the renowned Christian scholar of religions, Rudolph Otto, to refer to the Holocaust as the *tremendum*, a word resonant with the meaning of great fright at something of gigantic demonic proportion. Otto, so far as I know, never wrote of the Holocaust. Still, Cohen's use of Otto's term, *tremendum*, invokes profound fright, a sense of the abysmal enveloping victims and perpetrators alike. Sixty years after the Holocaust we who were youngsters, safe and sound in those terrible times, we who today are merely students

of the event, recoil from our sense of the abysmal, the *tremendum*, that we observe in film and read about in books.<sup>3</sup>

What can be made of this fact, that an otherwise civilized nation in the twentieth century undertook to make of its government's policy the eradication from the earth of every living Jew and Gypsy, of whatever age, and made great success in achieving that aim to the extent of six to seven million human beings? This event — call it Holocaust, *Churban*, *Shoah*, *Tremendum* — poses questions that puts we seekers of meaning to shame, knowing as we do that there are no true, simple, reliable answers. The hole in our understanding was dug by a million hands, a hundred nations, thousands upon thousands of individual and institutional acts of apathy and indifference to what was occurring in German-controlled Europe in the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

It is certainly true that the hole in our understanding was shaped by nineteen hundred years of Christian (Latin, Greek, Protestant) anti-Jewish contempt. And, if that contempt did not actually build brick-by-brick the Auschwitzes and the Treblinkas, one should not doubt that those murdering places could have come into being without nineteen hundred years of Jew-hatred.<sup>4</sup>

Historians and psychologists proceed from one set of facts to another, introducing explanations whenever appropriate — anti-Semitism, Judaeophobia, racism, collective neurosis — confidently laying claim to “understanding.” They have an easier time of it than we philosophers and theologians who presume to move beyond understanding to the discernment of meaning. We find ourselves in quicksand. For how is it possible to find meaning in the grotesque set of events that together comprise the rationally planned, technologically sophisticated, methodically enacted, and largely unemotional genocide of Europe's Jews and Gypsies.<sup>5</sup>

Lucy Davidowicz perceptively expressed, in the title of her book that Hitler's war against the western nations was in essence a “war against the Jews.”<sup>6</sup> That the Nazis did not wholly succeed in ridding the world of Jews had not to do with their will or skill but in their practical failure to conquer lands where the not-yet-murdered two-thirds of world Jewry lay. In referring to the Holocaust as abysmal we should not suppose that we can abandon rational inquiry and simply refer to the irrational. In thinking and writing about the Holocaust, as with few other events, the abysmal and the rational are close companions. We must recognize that with some



hideous acts inflicted on the innocent — hideous acts carried out by ordinary human beings born of fathers and mothers — we are quite simply confronted by abject mystery, an impenetrable concrete wall made of mixing the abysmal and the rational.<sup>7</sup>

It was not a thinker but a story-teller, Fyodor Dostoevsky, who in story after story dramatized the abysmal wellsprings of human action in which the rational seems indistinguishable from the irrational.<sup>8</sup> We should not forget that ordinary human beings did what they did because Nazi ideological policy decreed that the Jew (and for similar reasons Gypsies) were a bacterial threat, waste material, whose removal was necessary to cleanse the world. To accomplish that *cleansing* Germany weakened its own military effort by diverting badly needed manpower, transport, and supplies to establish and operate death camps. The Nazi Aryan ideology, and the actions that flowed from it, was the most abysmal mixing of the rational and the irrational that we yet know of in human history.

That the abysmal Holocaust event should be seen as fathomless (a never-to-be-understood and never-to-be-explained event) is inescapable. But, should the event also be seen as meaningless? Or, should we say that it is precisely the infinitely grotesque, the fathomless, the meaningless that cries out for meaning. After all, is it not true that the killing fields of genocide have moved from Europe to Asia and Africa? Since 1945 genocides have multiplied, and we now know with certainty that the extermination of whole peoples is a distinct possibility given the right combinations of political will, socio-religious attitudes, scientific technology, and public indifference.<sup>9</sup>

The quest for meaning inevitably entails the question of God in relation to the Holocaust. If we cling to traditional conceptions of God's majesty, omnipotence and providence, then we cannot go beyond the forthright and utterly honest declaration of Elisha ben Abuya: "There is no Law and there is no Judge." Personally I doubt that Elisha, in contemplating the traditional Hebraic belief in the God of wonder and wisdom — whose revelations are enshrined in scriptural accounts of Exodus, Sinai, Covenant, and the Promise of Messianic Redemption — could square this traditional belief with the facts of needless Jewish death and suffering during Rome's conquest of Judea. How much less, then, can we Jews and Christians today square the traditional belief in the majestic God with the facts of the Holocaust? Abandoning the traditional belief in God does not mean abandoning God. What it means is discarding as meaningless the notion that God can

be defined by the power to foresee and to act and to intervene — what, in our conventional piety, we call Providence. The Hebrew Bible is a dramatic story of God's Providence in behalf of his "chosen," his covenant bride, Israel. But history mocks the biblical story of the providential God, and thereby calls into question God's "choice" of Israel. After the Holocaust, if "chosenness" means anything, it means (as Arthur Cohen asserted) that the demon-god of Nazism chose the Jew, any and every Jew, irrespective of religious inclination or lack of it.<sup>10</sup>

If Rabbi Elisha were writing in the aftermath of the Holocaust he could not but say there is no law and there is no judge. He, above all, would know that his declaration wrecks all pious delusions that history is the carrying-out of God's mind, a divine plan from beginning to end enacted in time. For, had there been such a plan and such a God, that God would have acted swiftly, well before the Holocaust, to oppose any and every expression of anti-Semitism (ancient, medieval and modern) as leading inevitably and fatefully to genocide. But, to repeat, Elisha knew there was no such plan. Where does this leave us today, centuries after Elisha wrote and three generations after the Holocaust?

However sincere and urgent the question about God and the Holocaust, it can only be misdirected if we do not heed Cohen's teaching. He not only spoke of the *tremendum*, but stated that theology is not about God, but rather theology is about what the theologian has learned in his faith about God.<sup>11</sup> The key words here are "learning" and "faith." Theology is a mode of learning, and what one learns about are the dynamics of faith — the struggle to discern spiritual meaning through mythic stories, symbolic expressions, doctrinal guidelines, philosophical ideas — all weighed for meaning and for truth on the scales of human experience. This experience must include historical events that affect us as directly experienced or indirectly known through our reading of them.

Cohen regarded theology (correctly, I think) as a descriptive human science, an anthropological and phenomenological inquiry into the workings of the religious spirit. Here it is important for me to say now (later in this chapter to elaborate) that with respect to the question of God and the Holocaust, the answer we learn in faith is that the demonic is as real as the divine, that evil is as evident as goodness, that freedom is as powerful, perhaps even more powerful, than God. When we put our faith in a divine reality whose goodness has been revealed to us through a multitude

of religious myths and symbols in a host of world religions, this divine reality should always be seen in a perpetual struggle to win the human creature over from evil to goodness. This most fundamental theological truth was expressed by the mystical ponderings of the medieval Kabbalists, whose maverick, bold, profound findings were an irritant and challenge to the traditional theism of the rabbanim. The Kabbalists seem to have influenced the Rhineland mystics, most notably Jacob Boehme, who in turn influenced the Russian religious philosopher, Nicholas Berdyaev, who dared to think that human freedom was not only a divine reality but also a reality independent of the Creator God.<sup>12</sup>

That God is in a perpetual struggle to win human beings to the side of goodness has to be regarded as one of the most important theological truths to be learned from our personal faith in the divine reality. How to more fully understand what we learn in our faith is a question that extends beyond history into the metaphysical questions of Being, Nonbeing, and Becoming. For the question of evil, no less than the question of goodness, cannot be answered through history alone. History is vicissitude, and vicissitude defies meaning. Meaning only comes through the sound grasp of Being, Nonbeing, and Becoming — that is, through structures of reality that *frame* history, rendering vicissitude intelligible.<sup>13</sup> We should make it very clear that the metaphysical question that “extends beyond history” should not be misconstrued as an effacement of history. Metaphysics must illumine history or it is not a metaphysics worth studying.

When Jewish theologian Irving Greenberg demands that no theological statement be accepted that cannot stand before the burning of children, he is in effect saying that no metaphysical statement about reality or theological utterance about God and man need be taken seriously unless it can face the reality of absolute evil. I would agree, but I would add that theology is not a support for God or for some necessary God-principle. Rightly understood theology is an empirical and ontological inquiry into the transcendental forces — good and evil, divine and demonic, rational and irrational, religious and irreligious, creative and destructive — that are at work in history. Such inquiry can illumine history, rendering vicissitude intelligible. This means we cannot avoid difficult theological questions that arise from history.

Where was God when the children were being murdered? In our faith we want to believe He was there, hearing their cries, grieving. Precisely

because God is God and not the human, he could do nothing about it. And this must mean that God is limited — limited not by human beings (which God the Creator can move, inspire, judge, forgive, and always love as his creatures) — but limited by freedom which God did not create and over which God has no control.<sup>14</sup>

Other theological questions arise from history. Since the Bible teaches that God acts through his speaking, why in the murder of his own covenanted people was that voice silent? How can we speak of God who is good, just, wise, merciful, almighty, when the most evil of events occurred in full view of the Creator and Redeemer God? After Auschwitz should we conclude that this very God who elected Israel as his beloved Covenant-partner, and promised her blessing, that this God never was, and that what rules the world is not this God but a nameless, godless, demonic power?<sup>15</sup>

The answer is, “No,” if we are prepared to recognize that God has a struggle in inspiring human beings to use their freedom for good and not for evil. His success in the struggle is evidenced by the fact of love in human life and by countless daily acts of reason, imagination, courage, kindness, and compassion. But God also loses in the struggle, as seen in the history of human hatred and violence. I would like to think that there is a messianic redemption to resolve human history on God’s side. To remain consistent to my own theology that weighs principles according to human experience, however, I cannot accept any messianic resolution — Jewish or Christian or Islamic — of God’s struggle with human freedom for that would mean the end of human freedom. According to my way of theological thinking, *As long as there is the human, there will be the divine reality, there will be freedom-for-good and freedom-for-evil. And so, God’s struggle for the human soul in history is eternal or unending.* These, in my judgment, are the foundation stones for theological thinking about the Holocaust.<sup>16</sup>

## II

Perhaps it is an act of *chutzpa* for one such as myself (a Christian, not a Jew) to evaluate the various Jewish reactions to the question of God and the Holocaust. If so then I apologize for my *chutzpa*. My only defense is that I conduct this evaluation with admiration for the courage of the handful of Jewish thinkers who struggle with the terrible theological question raised by the destruction of European Jewry. I am saddened that so few Christian

thinkers are similarly willing to re-examine their own beliefs about God and Christ after Auschwitz. (I will say more about this at the end of the chapter.) In my own way I share with Jewish colleagues the struggle to understand what may not be understood, the struggle to discern meaning in an event that defies meaning.

To begin the evaluation let me first turn to ultra-orthodox traditionalists, *Haredim* (“the God-fearing”), who have reacted defensively to the Holocaust by upholding the sovereignty of God and reaffirming God’s law (Torah) in the face of the catastrophe. In a perceptive article the Israeli writer, Menachem Friedman, undertakes an analysis of this defensiveness.<sup>17</sup> He observes that while some of the most ancient biblical questions were evoked by the Holocaust, the traditionalists were not shaken in their faith. Those questions, “Where is their God?” (Psalms 115: 2, RSV) and “If the Lord is with us, why has all this befallen us?” (Judges 6:13, RSV), went unanswered. Friedman says that these were questions that the ultra-Orthodox could not risk addressing. For to address them would threaten the very foundation of their religion, a religion practiced as daily ritual devotion to a God of Torah, Covenant, Law.

Preferring to evade or ignore Holocaust questions traditionalists dramatized the gulf between their own religiosity and what they see as the Torah-denying secularity of many Jews. Friedman shows how *Haredi* thinkers chose to deal with questions about the Holocaust exclusively within traditionalist religious historiography. This historiography interprets Jewish disasters from Pharaoh’s enslavement of the Israelites through the destruction of the Temple and exile — according to biblical belief drawn from the vision shared by the Deuteronomic-Prophetic literature. These disasters are seen as the punishing judgment of God for Jewish sinful disobedience of Torah law. *Mipnei kha’teinu*, “because of our sins,” these disasters have befallen us.

Moreover, *Haredim* believe that Jews do not have to commit specific sins against the Torah law to be punished for disobedience and the mere sight of Jews falling away from strict Orthodox ritual observance was enough to arouse the wrath of God, as was the modern-day trend toward assimilation. This trend was exacerbated by what the *Haredim* see as the atheistic philosophies of rationalism, socialism, and Zionism. In all these matters there is a falling away from the Covenant, an offence in the sight of God who had to punish the offender for the sake of His own Holy Honor.

He did so in the Holocaust, wherein God used Hitler as a punishing rod, as He had previously used Nebuchadnezzar, to beat His disobedient Jewish people back into Torah-law obedience. Only thus could God's beloved Israel be restored in faith to the Covenant

Jewish critics view *Haredi* ultra-Orthodox thinking about the Holocaust as grotesque absurdity underscored by the glaring fact that the vast numbers of Holocaust victims were not socialists or assimilationists or Zionists, but rather the most Torah-obedient, ritually correct, of Eastern Europe's Jews. The absurdity is compounded when *Haredim* further exploit the fact of the Holocaust as a moral-religious justification for condemning Jewish abandonment of religion, non-observance of the Sabbath, and secular education given to Jewish children.<sup>18</sup>

In the eyes of the *Haredim*, the Zionist effort to secure and normalize Jewish existence with political/territorial independence and military power is defying God, for only God can bestow independence on the people Israel (which he will do in the days of Messianic redemption), and only God can provide the means of Israel's self-defense against her enemies. To assume otherwise by acting in support of the Zionist enterprise of immigration, settlement, and defense, is to defy God by imitating the Gentile nations. When this happens, say *Haredim*, the people Israel ceases to be God's beloved covenant bride.

There is also this wrenching historical irony in evaluating *Haredi* reactions to the Holocaust: the few thousand Jews in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century who responded positively to the Zionist vision of returning to the ancestral homeland actually escaped the Nazi persecution, while many more thousands, who spurned Zionism were eventually made victims of the persecution. No one felt the irony more than *Haredi* Rabbi Issachar Teichtal, an avowed anti-Zionist before the Second World War, who became a singular voice in blaming his own colleagues in the ultra-Orthodox camp for opposing Jewish nationalism. For had a Jewish state in Palestine existed in the 1930s there would have been a haven for Jews fleeing Hitler-dominated Europe.<sup>19</sup>

The absurdity of *Haredi* thinking lies in the way in which history is erased. History is believed to have no bearing on God, Israel, and Torah law, whose eternity and sovereignty cannot and will not be called into question by actual events. The soul of divine sovereignty in *Haredi* eyes is the ritual practice of law. As Arthur A. Cohen observed *Haredi* Judaism is an

“orthopraxy.”<sup>20</sup> From the stand-point of their “orthopraxy” the *Haredim* are saying that nothing in human history will make us change our religious way of living; we are going to continue to pray to God, await the Redemption, and observe all the ritual laws (*mitzvot*) no matter what we Jews have suffered in history. And, finally, we will interpret our suffering as God’s judgment on our sins and a warning never again to disobey God’s law.

Traditionalist Jewish thinking about the Holocaust is not confined to the Jewish world of the Orthodox or ultra-Orthodox. Ignaz Maybaum was a British Jewish Reform theologian, who suffered the death of his mother at Theresienstadt and two sisters at Auschwitz. It is from the heart that he addresses his provocative little book, *The Face of God after Auschwitz*.<sup>21</sup> What is remarkable about Maybaum’s book is that he, too, finds a place for Auschwitz in the embrace of God’s providence. He disagrees with traditionalists in saying that through the Nazi destruction, God poured out His wrath to punish secular Jews. His own view is that the Holocaust victims were actually chosen by God as sacrificial victims in order to bring God’s purposes to the modern world.

What are these purposes? To answer the question we must, Maybaum says, refer to earlier events of devastation or *Churban*. These were events in which God acted surgically to cut a part from the body of the world’s humanity so that the remaining parts can function in revived health. The first *Churban* was the destruction of the Temple of Solomon, which enabled Jews of *Diaspora* to bring God and the Torah to pagan nations. The second *Churban* destroyed Herod’s Temple, which ended blood sacrifice and brought the synagogue of bloodless prayer-worship into being. The third *Churban* occurred in the Holocaust.

What could have been the progress that resulted from the *Churban* of the Holocaust? Maybaum’s answer: As a result of this destruction six million Jews died, sacrificing their lives to end the oppression of Jewish life in the extended medieval Jewish ghetto. The Jewish victims of the Holocaust were in effect martyrs to freedom: making it possible for two-thirds of the world’s Jewish population (twelve million) to choose to live outside the ghetto-confinement of Talmudic law. In this way, Maybaum regards the Holocaust as an event of “creative destruction.”

Allowing for his sincerity and personal tragedy, one such as myself finds Maybaum’s thoughts on the Holocaust not merely wrong but actually repellent. To suppose that Jewish freedom from the confines of Talmudic

law was paid for “sacrificially” by the death of six million, and that this “progress” is somehow part of God’s providence, is a thought that matches *Haredi* thinking in grotesque absurdity.

### III

What of the post-Holocaust theologies of Emil Fackenheim, Eliezer Berkovitz, Richard L. Rubenstein, and Irving Greenberg? None of these thinkers could be considered *Haredi*. While all have been influenced by the rationalist energies of *Haskalah* Judaism, each considers himself wholly a Jew. None would accept the words “secular Jew” as accurately applying to them. For this reason their own more independent views on the Holocaust carry weight and their own struggles to discern meaning in that event have significance.

The salient and important difference between these thinkers and the *Haredim* is that while the *Haredim* seek to justify God in relation to the evil of the Holocaust, Fackenheim and other post-Holocaust thinkers eschew theodicy, making little or no attempt to explain, much less justify God in relation to the Holocaust. Eschewing theodicy these non-traditionalists focus their reflections on ways of being Jewish in a post-Holocaust age. The difference represents a notable theological shift from the God of Torah, to the Jewish people, and identification with the State of Israel. The most dramatic evidence of this shift is the way in which Jewish survival is invoked as a supreme value in a post-Holocaust age; it is a survival underscored by championing of the State of Israel as the Jews’ best hope for survival. The theme of survival is most pronounced in the writings of Fackenheim, but also loudly sounded in Berkovitz, Rubenstein, and Greenberg.

Emil Fackenheim writes eloquently to urge Jewish survival after the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup> Raising survival to the level of a theological imperative, he asserts that the “Commanding Voice of Auschwitz” forbids Jews to cease being Jews through assimilation, or conversion, or unfaith. Then, he adds that to do so would bestow on Hitler a posthumous victory. To reinforce his assertion Fackenheim speaks of adding one *mitzva* to the traditional 613 commandments of Judaism: do not bestow on Hitler a posthumous victory by ceasing to exist as a Jew.<sup>23</sup>

Fackenheim does not inform his readers as to how after Auschwitz the Jew is to heed “the Commanding Voice of Auschwitz,” or precisely



who or what is the “Commanding Voice”, or exactly how the added, 614th commandment, is to be obeyed. Despite these uncertainties Fackenheim’s own stress on *aliya* (or immigration) to Israel (as he himself immigrated following his retirement as a university professor) leaves no doubt as to his deepest feelings about what maintaining Jewish identity ultimately entails in a post-Holocaust world.

In writing about the Holocaust Fackenheim struggles to find or discern or create or invent *meaning* in an event in which he knows, better than most because *he* was a concentration camp inmate, defies meaning. His attention is not focused on where was God in the time of Auschwitz, because it is an unanswerable question that assumes belief in an interventionist deity — a deity that he rejects. Rather, Fackenheim’s attention is focused on a question which can be answered. What should a Jew feel/think/do after Auschwitz, knowing as the Jew, above all, knows: there was a man (Hitler) and an ideology (Nazism), that had no higher collective purpose than to rid the earth of Jews — man, woman, and child. Fackenheim’s response should be read as the response of righteous opposition. The Jew must survive precisely as a Jew. Survival, in effect, defeats the sworn goal of Hitler and the Nazis.

Fackenheim avoids the question of God altogether in focusing on the question of Jewish identity in the post-Holocaust world. He avoids repeating the absurdities of *Haredi* efforts to justify God in relation to the Holocaust, but not without cost to clarity. If it is God’s Voice that is the “Commanding Voice of Auschwitz,” the same Commanding Voice that was also heard at Red Sea and Sinai, then, as the critic Dan Sherbok-Cohen has remarked, Fackenheim’s advocacy of the 614th commandment seems superfluous. For the commandment that a Jew survive as a Jew was earlier declared at the Red Sea and at Sinai, no less than at Auschwitz.<sup>24</sup> But, in fairness to Fackenheim, one should say that to add the “Commanding Voice of Auschwitz” (albeit “superfluously”) to the Red Sea and Sinai is to add it with compelling meaning. Sherbok-Cohen seems to miss the point of Fackenheim’s own rebellious confrontation with Jewish religious tradition, and his earnest effort to end the rebellion in a way that allows a Jew to live forward and not be crippled by the past. My only question is whether Fackenheim’s way of resolving the question of Jewish existence in a post-Holocaust world is not achieved at the cost of a more direct and honest probing of the nature of God in connection to the Holocaust. I ask

this question because Fackenheim, one of the most eminent religious philosophers of our time, curiously avoids the questions of God's existence and nature in relation to the Holocaust. If God is only a Voice commanding Jewish survival after Auschwitz, then, as the philosopher Michael Wyschogrod has noted, Fackenheim's theology of Jewish survival takes on the appearance of an exclusivist ideology.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking of God's "Commanding Voice" rising from the ashes of Auschwitz may be one rhetorical expression. Another such expression is seen in Eliezer Berkovitz's assertion that God was silent or absent at the time of the Holocaust, that God's face was turned, "hidden," *hester panim*, at this time.<sup>26</sup> The advantage of Berkovitz' assertion is that it is drawn directly from Hebrew scriptures. But that is its only advantage and it hardly answers the question of God's existence and nature after Auschwitz.

Unfortunately, Berkovitz does not ask how it is that God, who so loved his people Israel as to bestow on them his covenant, could remain silent, hiding his face as it were, at the time of the worst crisis in Jewish history. Berkovitz, very like Fackenheim, rejects atheism, and probably would not agree to Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya's conclusion, that there is no Law and there is no Judge. Certainly, Berkovitz would agree with Fackenheim's stress on Jewish survival, but then he (Berkovitz) seems strangely compelled to find a specific "justification" for God in the Holocaust. Reminding us of Ignaz Maybaum, he asserts that the Holocaust victims died as martyrs, affirming their belief in God in the very midst of His terrible silence. Thus, Berkovitz relies on the age-old Jewish response to persecution, invoking the notion of *Kiddush ha Shem* — that the Jew, who suffers death as a Jew, witnesses to the divine name and thereby proves a martyr to the God of Israel. In a somewhat mystical vein Berkovitz says that "Those Jews who died in the camps with God's name on their lips glimpsed His presence in their suffering."<sup>27</sup>

There are echoes of traditionalist thinking in Berkovitz's formulation, but he would not accept the traditionalist belief that the Holocaust victims were punished for disobeying Torah law. So, one would have to say that, whereas Fackenheim looks "forward" in stressing Jewish survival after Auschwitz, Berkovitz looks "backward" in asserting a mystical bond between God and Holocaust victims as martyrs to the divine name. But, without disclosing the truth (if, in fact, there is a truth) of the martyrdom of the Holocaust victims, Berkovitz, no more than Fackenheim, actually

provides a specifically theological answer to the question of God after Auschwitz.

Richard L. Rubenstein shares with Fackenheim and Berkovitz the argument that the only justifiable Jewish response to the Holocaust is Jewish survival.<sup>28</sup> And, he agrees that this survival is best expressed by the State of Israel whose Jews have radically altered Jewish existence by focusing it on nature rather than history. This means that because of the Israeli state the Jew in the world can live more freely, more fully, with less fear, than ever before.

While sharing the belief in Jewish survival after Auschwitz, Rubenstein distances himself from the thought that there can be any “meaning in the Holocaust.” However, it is a mistake to assume that he takes the position of atheism. What he wishes to emphasize is that we live in the time of the death of God. This is more than a rhetorical expression drawn from Nietzsche’s philosophy. The death of God means the collapse of all authority: religious, political, ethical. It is an event that renders the cosmos empty and hostile.

When I say we live in the time of the death of God I mean that the thread uniting god and man, Heaven and earth, has been broken. We stand in a cold, silent, unfeeling, cosmos, unaided by power beyond our own resources. After Auschwitz, what else can a Jew say about God.<sup>29</sup>

Rubenstein stands-out as the one Jewish theologian who has most directly addressed the question of God in relation to the Holocaust. Yet, significantly, the assertion that “we live in a time of the death of God” seems a burden too heavy to bear for suddenly he finds meaning through traditional Jewish ritual observances. The value of such observances is controlling the darker aspects of human life, one of which is violence. The sort of violence that was unleashed in the death camps can be harnessed and controlled by the archaic dimensions of Jewish religious faith.

Just here I would ask if the meaning, derived from the very Jewish rituals that Rubenstein advocates, is a suitable Jewish response to the death of God. Is not, in fact, meaning dependent on traditional Jewish belief in God? Are these rituals (sacrifice, circumcision, Sabbath) not celebrations of the very God who has given life and purpose to his beloved Covenant people, Israel?

In a wide-ranging, powerfully-written essay, “Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust,” author Irving Greenberg offers his own reflection on the meanings of God, Jewish existence, and Jewish-Christian relations after Auschwitz.<sup>30</sup> For him the magnitude of the Jewish destruction has profound significance for both Jewish and Christian thinking about redemption and messianic hope. In Greenberg’s account the Holocaust is a measure for the seriousness and truth of any and every theological reflection about God and human life. What is that measure? Greenberg’s answer is to cite the evidence of the Nazi decision to save the cost of gassing children by throwing them alive into pits of burning fire. Then he issues this warning: “...no statement, theological or otherwise, should be made that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children.”<sup>31</sup>

In light of what Rabbi Greenberg has written, the question for us ought to be whether any theological statement is credible when the measure of burning children is invoked? I personally share Greenberg’s doubt that the Christian message of accomplished redemption can be credible in light of burning children. But we should also ask if the message of God’s covenant with Israel is not similarly thrown into doubt. Greenberg seems to understand this for he speaks of “working through the Holocaust experience” where that seems to mean doubt about the Jew’s relationship to the God of the Covenant.<sup>32</sup>

Greenberg’s point is that doubt must be earned and not simply argued theologically. What “earns” doubt is recognizing that there is no “easy dichotomy of atheist/theist” and that faith is not reducible to doctrine or demonstration — which means that genuine faith is suffused with doubt. Greenberg then speaks of dialectical faith. “Neither Exodus nor Easter wins out or is totally blotted out by Buchenwald, but we encounter both polar experiences: the life of faith is lived between them.” By the “life of faith” Greenberg speaks modestly of “moment faiths,” modest or moment because doubt raised by Auschwitz requires that we do not think in terms of absolutes, either in affirmation or denial. We can only speak dialectically, in moments, with the tentativeness of doubt and humility. This it seems to me is what Greenberg means by dialectical faith. I couldn’t agree more.<sup>33</sup> The place where I disagree with this most perceptive of post-Holocaust Jewish theologians is where he renders the birth of the Jewish state an explicit theological category. He writes: “Israel’s faith in the God of

History demands that an unprecedented event of destruction be matched by an unprecedented act of redemption, and this has happened.”<sup>34</sup> In my opinion, despite his avowal of “dialectical faith,” it is here Greenberg seems to revert to a traditionalist belief in a God who providentially controls history, balancing the negativity of the Holocaust with the positive-ness of the Israeli state. Whatever we may think of his dialectical theology of “moment faith,” Greenberg’s assertion ignores history. We know that while Jewish immigration to Israel was increased by Nazi rule in Germany and Austria, the colonization and development of pre-state Israel was brought about well before the Nazi period; brought about, in fact, by the vision and initiatives of secular-minded Jews often in tension with traditional beliefs about God and the Biblical *Eretz* Israel,

To theologically connect the Holocaust and Israel under the rubric of destruction/redemption is also to make of Holocaust victims a sacrifice redeemed or made good somehow by the birth of the modern State of Israel. My response is that it is appalling to think that an immense human destruction was a price paid for the creation of a modern Jewish state. The question to be asked of Greenberg was put most perceptively by Christian theologian Alan Davies, when he asked, “If the event of the Holocaust stood alone, without any connection to the birth of the Jewish state, would Judaism retain its classical theological form of God’s covenant with Israel?”<sup>35</sup> I do not know if Greenberg ever responded to this question. But speaking only for me the answer could only be negative.

We can conclude this section by commenting on two distinguished contemporary Jewish thinkers, Jacob Neusner and Michael Wyschogrod, who find in post-Holocaust Jewish reactions no reason to entertain doubts about God and His Covenant with the Jewish people. Quite the opposite, the Holocaust is a challenge to Jews to reaffirm religious faith.

Jacob Neusner writes that “Jewish public discourse has been ill-served by ‘Auschwitz’ without the eternity of Israel, misled by setting the response against Hitler in place of the answer to God who commands, and corrupted by sentimentality, emotionalism, and bathos.”<sup>36</sup> Neusner does not share the *Haredi* theodicy, *mipnei kha’teinu* (because of our sins), and yet his is a defense of tradition in the face of Auschwitz. Without ever explaining the meaning of “respond,” he writes that “Judaic piety has all along known how to respond to disaster.”<sup>37</sup> He then goes on to say:

For those to whom classical Judaism offers no viable option, the Holocaust changes nothing. One who did not believe in God before he knew about the Holocaust is not going to be persuaded to believe in Him on its account. One who believed in the classical perception of God presented by the Judaic theologians is not going to be forced to change his perception on its account.

And he concludes in a defiant tone:

Jews find in the Holocaust no new definition of Jewish identity because we need none. Nothing has changed. The tradition endures.<sup>38</sup>

Michael Wyschogrod reacts to Fackenheim's assertion of the "Commanding Voice" rising from Auschwitz in these words: "I do not think that a voice can be extracted from the Holocaust which will speak to believer and non-believer alike. I do not think that the question of faith can be circumvented by means of Auschwitz. For me the Holocaust was a totally destructive event which makes my remaining a Jew infinitely more difficult than it has ever been."<sup>39</sup>

Less defiant in tone than Neusner, Wyschogrod offers his own reasoned defense of Jewish tradition.

... Israel's faith has always centered about the saving acts of God: the election, the Exodus, the Temple and the Messiah. However more prevalent destruction was in the history of Israel, the acts of destruction were enshrined in minor fast days while those of redemption became the joyous proclamation of the Passover and Tabernacles, of Hanukkah and Purim. The God of Israel is a redeeming God; this is the only message we are authorized to proclaim, however much it may not seem so to the eyes of non-belief. Should the Holocaust cease to be peripheral to the faith of Israel, should it enter the Holy of Holies and become the dominant voice that Israel hears, it could not but be a demonic voice that it would be hearing. There is no salvation to be extracted from the Holocaust, no faltering Judaism can be revived from it, no new reason for the continuing of the Jewish people can be found in it. If there is hope after the Holocaust, it is because to those who believe the voices of the Prophets speak more loudly than did Hitler, and

because the divine promise sweeps over the crematoria and silences the voices of Auschwitz.<sup>40</sup>

“The God of Israel is a redeeming God: this is the only statement we are authorized to make...” And with this statement Wyschogrod, like Neusner, takes his position on the side of reaffirming traditional religious faith, eschewing theological speculations about God, evil, and the Jewish people.

#### IV

To conceive of God anew after the Holocaust is the challenge faced by Arthur A. Cohen in his provocative book, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*. Cohen condenses a lifetime of reflection into a slim book on a very weighty subject. In doing so he gives his own distinct reasons for believing in God after the Holocaust. His book stands in marked contrast to the position taken by Yehuda Bauer, a technical historian with little patience for theological/metaphysical discussions of the Holocaust, calling them a “dead end.” For Cohen the real question is the nature of that God in whom one can believe after the Holocaust.

Cohen begins by noting that for the first time in history, Jewish theologians after Auschwitz are “unable to account for God’s ways.” In that respect Jewish theologians are no better off than Christian theologians:

I cannot believe that any Christian theology of a God *who has already saved* can make much sense after the *tremendum*...[and that God] founded the law through the giving of his name, that God in all his conventional providence and careful attention to the real is no less impossible to Jewish thinking beyond the *tremendum*.<sup>41</sup>

The strength of Arthur Cohen’s decidedly “theological interpretation” of the Holocaust is that it offers an account of human faith in God in full view of the facts of the destruction of European Jewry. Adopting (as stated earlier) a Latin word from Rudolph Otto’s classic work, *The Idea of the Holy*, Cohen names that destruction, the *tremendum* — to suggest the radically demonic expression of evil in the human destruction. He writes that:

It is possible to link...the death camps, the *tremendum* of the abyss, to the *mysterium tremendum* of God, who is sometimes in

love with creation and its creatures and sometimes...indifferent to their fate.<sup>42</sup>

Cohen's point is that the Holocaust as *tremendum* represents a revelation of evil no less real, no less powerful than the revelation of the holiness of God. The qualities of power and mystery and uniqueness are no less present in the one than in the other.

In taking his stance, Cohen shows boldness in directly facing the question of faith in God after Auschwitz. Unlike the other Jewish theologians discussed here, Cohen does not shift attention from faith in the person of God to the question of what is desirable, or commendable, or meaningful in Jewish self-identity after Auschwitz — as Fackenheim, Berkovitz, Greenberg, and Rubenstein (each in his own way) has done. The difference here is important. Cohen, unlike his colleagues, keeps his eyes trained on the question, what must or should a Jew, as Jew, *think* of God after Auschwitz? His answer proves him to be a far more radical theologian than his colleagues, who (in my opinion) side-step the question of faith-in-God in order to concentrate on the appropriate posture for Jewish life in a post-Holocaust world

To repeat what was said earlier, the important question for Cohen is not where was God at the time of Auschwitz, but what can we learn of human faith in God in full view of the facts of Auschwitz? Although Cohen approaches the question of faith in radical, non-traditional theological ways, his own formulations reminds us of the efforts of both Neusner and Wyschogrod to realistically acknowledge the Holocaust and reaffirm religious faith in spite of the Holocaust. However, the difference between Cohen on one side, and Neusner and Wyschogrod on the other, is that Cohen, alone, is willing to offer new conceptions of God and of faith-in-God. The result is that Cohen is singular among all the Jewish theologians treated in this chapter in proposing what faith means and ought to mean to a Jew after Auschwitz.

The measure of Cohen's singular independence of thought is shown in that he, alone, approaches the Holocaust from a theological/metaphysical point-of view. He recognizes that the evil of the Holocaust represents an evil which exceeds the judgments of morality and points to "ontic evil," the manifestation of abysmal power on the part of "infinetized man," who knows no god because he is god, giving and taking life at will.<sup>43</sup> One should



not suppose that “ontic evil” is compatible with the traditional biblical teaching about the God who acts in history. To continue to faithfully adhere to such a God, Cohen suggests that we must introduce some important reconsiderations of “the God who acts in history.”<sup>44</sup>

If our conception of God is limited to the realm of history, then we as human beings should take the position of atheism — that God does not exist, because if he did exist then his failure in history demonstrates that his own existence has less value than the tears of frightened and beaten human children as seen in the widely published photograph of the Jewish children trudging along railroad tracks to a strange and awful place. It is to the credit of Richard L. Rubenstein that he was one of the first Jewish theologians who correctly drew from the evidence of Auschwitz a skeptical conclusion, *a la* Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya — even if his own formulation of God’s death was hedged.<sup>45</sup>

Most provocatively Cohen argues that historical events as such are “meaningless” (for what happens just happens). I would agree. In doing so, I separate myself from Yehuda Bauer, whose historical account of the Holocaust is outstanding but does not confront the question of meaning that is provoked by the Holocaust. Here, for me, the question of meaning boils down to God and his human creatures as regards the Holocaust. If we are to find meaning that shows what our faith in God has taught us of the spiritual truth in this event, then we are obliged to turn away from the providential God who acts in history. We do so in order to fix our attention on precisely larger categories of theological/metaphysical judgment — the Being, Nonbeing, and Becoming of God in relation to what happens to human beings on earth. Only by reaching beyond history to grasp transcendental (ontological) structures of reality is history, in my view, invested with meaning. For history, as the poet well stated, is a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Through the grasping of transcendental meaning the active evil-doing of human beings will remain a mystery but it need no longer remain inexplicable, without meaning. For mystery, most particularly the mystery of evil, carries great meaning.

What is the transcendental meaning to be grasped? To answer we should begin with the abandonment of the conventional belief in God’s providence. God never directly acts in history because he cannot do so. God’s relation to history is found not in action but in possibility made

available to human freedom for realization or action. God does not make history through miraculous providential acts, but rather makes history *possible* by the plenitude of his Being, always leaving it to human beings to actually make history through their action.

Being, Nonbeing, and Becoming are slippery terms that recall Greek metaphysical designations of primordial structures of reality. Yet the God, Yahweh, who created the world, befriended Abraham, disclosed his Covenant law, and made his justice, mercy, and love known to prophets — this God Yahweh hardly seems like the eternal, impassable, perfect Being (*ens perfectissimum*) championed by Greek philosophers and extolled by the medieval Christian theologians.

Yet there is one aspect of the Greek/Medieval concept of Being worth preserving — that of permanence. God would not be God if he were not eternally God, if he were not everlastingly the Divine Being, or Ground of Being (as Paul Tillich called God). It is equally true that, consistent with the biblical witness of the Creator God, the meaning of permanence is the ceaseless creativity of the Creator God. Creativity is God's plenitude as Becoming. This means that God grows, declines, suffers, gains and loses value dependent upon the freely willed actions of his creatures. Human actions contribute directly to the life of God. God is no by-stander to life and history; he is fully involved in the lives and fortunes of his creatures.

Cohen himself speaks in a most eloquent way of the divine creativity. He speaks of the Being and Becoming of God as a *possibility*, never an actuality.<sup>46</sup> The *possibility* is for both God and the human. God is the creator of the human only in making it possible not so much to possess freedom, but rather to exercise the freedom humans already have innately, independently of God. In a similar vein, Nicholas Berdyaev (influenced by Jacob Boehme), Meister Eckhart, and Friedrich Schelling, argued that freedom was not of God's making. For Berdyaev freedom is uncreated, equal in power to the Creator God. The human being is the creature of both God and Freedom.<sup>47</sup>

God is wholly and unequivocally the Being whose plenitude consists of the ideal possibilities of love, truth, and justice, mercy and compassion. Ideals do not become concrete save through actions born of human freedom. Only the human-in-freedom can do this; God cannot. In this respect God has no power. Berdyaev was fond of saying that God has less power than an ordinary policeman. God always awaits the human response of

freedom. If humans do not respond to the ideals of love, truth, and justice it is both God's failure and a human failure. It is God's failure because he failed to inspire humans to the good, and it is human failure because men and women failed to act from God's inspiration. This means that the only power God has is the power of inspiration, the power of persuasion, as the philosopher A. N. Whitehead said, following Plato. By contrast, humans have immeasurable power of freedom for both good and evil.

In speaking of the Holocaust as *tremendum*, Cohen acknowledges the "immeasurable power of freedom" manifested in evil. We can also speak here of a metaphysic of evil (Cohen prefers the term "ontic evil") which is Nonbeing, the abysmal power perpetually contending with the creativity of God. Berdyaev makes the important point that freedom is as much part of the structure of Nonbeing (*meontic* freedom) as of Being. This means that God was not solely the author of freedom. Since freedom is caused by Being no less than by Nonbeing, we must allow a certain dualism in our theism, if we are to maintain a rational belief in God and show an equally rational respect for the reality of evil, consistent with a view of human freedom.<sup>48</sup>

From a conventionally religious point of view the belief in world-creation by the one all-powerful God also included the belief that God authored freedom and bestowed freedom as a gift on human beings. It was a colossal theological mistake. The reason is that the majority of theologians of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in their conventional thinking could not imagine a God who was not an all-powerful God and, therefore, a God who authored both creation and freedom. What resulted was the reducing of evil to physical deeds and making God more a source of power rather than of possibility. What also resulted was the removal of any sound ontological basis for understanding freedom's relation to God and to human beings, and thereby freedom's relation to good and evil.

We can be certain that God is the divine inspiration to our freedom because ideals of value are manifested in daily acts of love, courage, and compassion, in countless events that reconcile and heal the world. Divine inspiration is embodied in innumerable human personalities that point us away from evil towards the good in life. Emil Fackenheim, Irving Greenberg, Alan Berger and other contemporary Jewish thinkers urge human beings to engage in *tikkun olam* ("mending of the world"), which is the only truly divine/human response to a post-Holocaust world.

Why, then, the existence of evil? The answer is that evil, like goodness, arises from the dynamic of freedom. The dynamic of freedom is bi-polar: freedom-for-good, logically and ontologically, entails freedom-for-evil.<sup>49</sup> Why human beings choose to act for evil and not for goodness is, of course, the central mystery of human existence — a mystery which will remain despite the considerable efforts of psychologists, theologians, and philosophers to “explain” evil’s causes.

The Holocaust is this most powerful manifestation of the mystery of evil that we know of. In the Holocaust evil was no longer seen to be evil or reduced in significance as evil by ideology, propaganda, and bureaucracy. As this happened evil was dehumanized, secularized, radically altered; evil was made to be normal, ordinary, routine. With those changes evil became immensely more deadly and destructive. The Devil lost his tale and put on a smiling face. Was this changed character of the Devil not the essential point of Hannah Arendt’s analysis of Adolph Eichmann? Was this not the really meaning of her potent expression the “banality of evil?”

Cohen shares with all the post-Holocaust Jewish theologians the rejection of divine intervention. God cannot be the God who intervenes in history because if He were He would not have hesitated to rescue Jews from the concentration camps and death camps. We know this because in our faith we believe God is good and just and merciful. The central question about God that emerges from our study of the Holocaust and its dramatization of evil’s power is the question of goodness, not of power. In Cohen’s words, “the question...is not how God can abide in a world of evil, but how can God be affirmed meaningfully in a world where evil enjoys such dominion.”<sup>50</sup>

To speak of Holocaust evil is to speak of ultimate evil, not evil as final. The “burning children” are ultimate evil, not evil as the final truth about life for humans and for God. If evil were final, it would mean that, as Richard Rubenstein once contended, everything is run by “blind caprice” and the targeting of Jews in the Holocaust must be the action of a malevolent deity.

Where does that leave us in the inter-relationships of good and evil, God, human beings, history, and the Holocaust? Cohen’s answer is an extended metaphor:

I understand divine life to be rather a filament within the historical but never the filament that we can identify and ignite according to

our requirements ... [for] the historical is the domain of human freedom.

Cohen further elaborates:

Given these assumptions, it would follow that the *tremendum* does not alter the relation of God to himself, nor the relation in which God exists to the historical, nor the reality of creation to the process of eternal beginning within God, but it does mean that man — not God — renders the filament of the divine incandescent or burns it out. There is, in the dialectic of man and God amid history, the indispensable recognition that man can obscure, eclipse, burn out the divine filament, grounding its natural movement of transcendence by a sufficient and oppository chthonic subscension. It is this which is meant by abyss of the historical, the demonic, the *tremendum*.<sup>51</sup>

## V

Where does this leave the matter of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior of the world? And what does my Christian faith mean to me after Auschwitz? I ask these questions as a baptized Christian who chooses to remain Christian.

To the Christian “a God who has already saved” (to use Cohen’s words) is precisely what traditionally the Christian is asked to believe by the church’s proclamation of the God who incarnated himself in Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself to atone for the sins of mankind. Cohen’s full expression of thought is “I cannot believe that any Christian theology of a God *who has already saved* can make much sense after the *tremendum*.”

In the previous chapter which dealt with Christianity and the Holocaust, I have in my own way said the same thing in my rejection of the Pauline teaching of Christ’s “accomplished redemption.”<sup>52</sup> But now the more important question is that of Christian faith — my faith. Why do I continue to remain committed to Christ’s lordship over me — not over the world — but over me, personally. The answer is that as a young man I came under the influence of the writings of Søren Kierkegaard, particularly his notion of truth-as-subjectivity.<sup>53</sup> For Kierkegaard and for me, the truth of Christian faith can only be subjective, existential, personal, a truth that

cannot be spoken, much less argued or bandied about — as Patriarch Abraham (according to Kierkegaard's remarkable analysis) could not speak of God's command of him to slay his son, Isaac.<sup>54</sup> Similarly for me, faith is not to be bandied about, broadcast, made public. What this means for me is that the imperative of Christian witness lies not in words but in deeds alone (*tikkun olam*). Therein lies the meaning of Christ's lordship in my life. My faith empowers me to obey God's moral law and, by my example, hope to inspire others to do the same. To me this means that the Becoming of God (divine creativity) has directly influenced and inspired me to use my freedom in behalf of the moral law and not against it. In my faith God has done so through the example of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In my faith I follow his example. I strive to lead the Christian life. In so doing I adhere to the vision set forth in the First Letter of John: "God is love, and who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." (I John 4:16, RSV) "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." (I John 5:3, RSV)

So what, then, is the relevance of my faith to the event of the Holocaust? I answer that my faith shows me that God did not die at Auschwitz, but he experienced an unprecedented defeat there. I recall the Bronze Statue that depicts a huge gash in the Torah Scrolls — a Holocaust memorial standing in the Garden of the Weizmann Technion in Rehovot, Israel. But, it is important to say that defeat is not death, just as ultimate evil is not final evil, nor is the world given over to a malevolent deity. The creative energy of God is ceaseless, inspiring faith in human beings irrespective of their religious configuration, leading, persuading them away from evil to good. God is the source of this inspiration for his creatures because of the ontological/moral structure that connects Creator and creature.

## Notes

1. Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya's words are cited from "The Tractate Hagigah," *The Talmud, Selected Writings*, trans. Ben-Zion Botser (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 126–129. See also, Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University, 2001), p. 200. A well-argued and plain-spoken variation of Rabbi Elisha's skepticism is presented in Steven L. Jacobs' book, *Rethinking Jewish Faith: The Child of a Survivor Responds* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).
2. A most forceful expression of the fear that the genocide of children might be somehow rendered an event of rational comprehension is to be found in Irving Greenberg's essay, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity," *Auschwitz: Beginning of A New Era?*, Eva Fleischer, ed. (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. 7–55.
3. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust* (New York: Crossroad, 1981). Inga Clendinnen presents a lucid account of the sense of the abysmal felt in reading about the Holocaust in her fine book, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
4. It was the French historian, Jules Isaac, who introduced the expression "the teaching of contempt," to describe the doctrines and decisions of the church directed against Jews and Judaism, a "contempt" he traced back through the Gospels of the New Testament. Jules Isaac, *Genese de l'Antisemitisme* (Paris: Calman-Levy, 1956).
5. The cold efficiency of the Nazi mass murder program is described in many books. A particularly useful and readable account is given in Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz, the Holocaust and its Legacy*, revised edition (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).
6. Lucy Davidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1975).
7. Arthur A. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 26, 28.
8. The blending of rational and irrational is most effectively dramatized in Dostoevsky's novella, *Notes From Underground*. See also, my own essay, Thomas A. Idinopulos, "Dostoevsky's Criminal Heroes: The Ethics of Russian Atheism," *Cross Currents*, vol. XXV, 2, Summer 1975, 131–148.
9. For studies of post-Holocaust genocides, See Nicolaus Mills and Kira Brunner, eds., *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and The Politics of Intervention* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
10. It was Rabbi Elisha ben Abuya's skepticism about God in relation to the Jewish massacres at the time of Roman war against Judea that provoked

rabbis to anathematize him as *Acher*, the Other (“He who shall not be named.”) See Hermann L. Strack, *Introduction to Talmud and Mishnah* (New York: Temple Book, Atheneum, 1969), p. 114. Compare Rabbi Eli-sha’s skepticism to the theological implications behind Arthur A. Cohen’s assertion: “Whether the Jews are a chosen people. They are chosen, unmistakably, extremely, utterly.” *The Tremendum*, p. 11.

11. Arthur A. Cohen, op. cit., p. 60.
12. Arthur A. Cohen, op. cit., ch. 2, “The Tremendum as Caesura: A Phenomenological Comment on the Holocaust,” esp., 32–34. See Jeanne Angelet-Hustace, *Men of Wisdom: Master Eckhart and the Rhineland Mystics*, trans. Hilda Graef (New York & London: Harper Torchbooks and Longmans, 1957). See also Nicholas Berdyaev, *Destiny of Man* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960), pp. 23–44. Alan L. Berger remarks that “...kabbalistic literature sought to account for the existence of evil and the demonic in cosmic terms...[that] kabbalistic theodicy is a complex phenomenon — at times suggesting the evil is an element within the godhead itself while, on other occasions, contending that evil is an independent reality...” *Crisis and Covenant: The Holocaust in American Jewish Fiction* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), pp. 5–6.
13. God’s struggle to win human beings to the side of good and away from evil is discussed at length in a number of authors, most particularly in the dipolar theism of A. N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, and Nicholas Berdyaev. For a useful discussion of dipolar theism affecting good and evil see, *Philosophers Speak of God*, eds. Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reece (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix books, 1953). In my judgment, Arthur A. Cohen’s theological reflections on the Holocaust show the influence of dipolar theism.
14. Greenberg, Irving, “Pillar of Fire...,” *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?*, Eva Fleischer, ed., pp. 8–11.
15. Arthur A. Cohen acknowledges the ontological reality of evil in these words: “...all that is contended at this point is that evil is a real force, that its negativity and destructiveness are no less an aspect of the human structure than is that structure’s potency for good...” *The Tremendum*, p. 33. He also says that “Evil has ontic reality no less than the good,” *loc cit*. In discussing evil, Cohen contends (rightly in my judgment) that the medieval conception of evil as the privation of goodness, based as it is on outdated Greek philosophical assumptions, is deficient in dealing with the immensity of evil manifested in the Holocaust. Cohen’s ontological account of evil is reinforced by the excellent article of Lewis S. Feuer, “The Reasoning of Holocaust Theology,” *Judaism*, vol. 35, 2 (spring, 1986), pp. 198–210.



16. In addition to works by Nicholas Berdyaev, A.N. Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne, I should say that the empirical theological method as shown in the books of Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Eugene Meland, and my colleague William Dean (where religious ideas are held to experiential standards) have had considerable influence on my own efforts to come to terms theologically with the event of the Holocaust.
17. Menachem Friedman, "The Haredim and the Holocaust," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, 53 (winter, 1990), pp. 86–114.
18. To appreciate the sense of "grotesque absurdity" in ultra-orthodox thinking about the Holocaust, See the analysis in Yehuda Bauer, op. cit., pp. 196–211
19. Rabbi Teichtal is quoted from his book ("Joyful Mother of Sons") *Em Habanim Semecha*, Menachem Friedman, op. cit., p. 88.
20. On "orthopraxy," see Arthur A. Cohen, op. cit., pp. 75–78.
21. Ignaz Maybaum, *The Face of God After Auschwitz* (Amsterdam, Pollack and Van Gennep, 1965).
22. Emil Fackenheim's view on the Holocaust are best stated in *God's Presence in History* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972). See also, Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return Into History*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), and *To Mend the World*, (New York Schocken Books, 1982).
23. Fackenheim, *God's Presence*, ibid., pp. 84–104.
24. Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology* (London: Lamp Press, 1989), pp.52–55.
25. See Michael Wyschogrod's probing review of Fackenheim's *God's Presence in History* in "Faith and History," *Judaism*, vol. 20, 3 (summer, 1971), pp. 286–294.
26. Eliezer Berkovitz, *Faith After The Holocaust* (New York: KTAV, 1973).
27. Eliezer Berkovitz, ibid., p. 85. If one compares Berkovitz's view of Jewish martyrdom in the Holocaust with what Lewis Feuer writes, one cannot escape the conclusion that no martyr's "witness to truth" was provided by Hitler's murder of Jew. Lewis writes: "The Jewish victims of Hitler were not accorded the privilege of martyrdom, the vestigial residue of their human status ... this was unprecedented in the annals of persecution." "The Reasoning of Holocaust Theology," *Judaism*, vol. 35, 2 (spring,1986), p. 204.
28. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Essays on Radical Theology and the Death of God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). See also, Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: History, Theology, and Contemporary Judaism* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992).
29. Richard L. Rubenstein, ibid., (1966), p. 152. I am indebted to Alan L. Berger for bringing my attention to Rubenstein's *The Cunning of History*:

*The Holocaust and the American Future* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1978) where the “death of God” is elucidated as the collapse of all traditional authority, pp. 90–91. It should also be said here that since the publication of *After Auschwitz* in 1966 Rubenstein’s theological position has continued to evolve. In a more recent book, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, rev. ed. (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2003) he seems no longer to want to speak of living in the time of the Death of God and he no longer regards the cosmos as “cold, silent, unfeeling.” Now he refers to the “Divine Life,” and extols religious ritual as life-affirming. (p. 340–348). For a useful account of the changes in Rubenstein thinking over time, see Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Holocaust Theology*, op. cit., pp. 87–91. Needless to say my own effort to understand Rubenstein’s “death of God” thesis is a response to a specific theological position taken at a given time and not a response to a person as to how that person may have changed his thoughts.

30. Irving Greenberg, “Cloud of Smoke...,” op. cit.
31. Op. cit., p. 34.
32. Op. cit., p. 27.
33. Op. cit., p. 28. It should be noted that Greenberg has more recently moved beyond “moment faith” to emphasize the voluntary aspect of Jewish faith in a post-holocaust world. See Irving Greenberg, *The Voluntary Covenant* (New York: National Jewish Resource Center, 1982). My only question here is whether Greenberg’s admirable efforts to present a post-Holocaust version of Jewish Orthodox faith are not a break with the traditional belief (*Torah* and *Talmud*) that God unilaterally bestowed the Covenant on Israel as a unique blessing and as a burden of responsibility?
34. Op. cit., p. 32.
35. Alan T. Davies, “Response to Irving Greenberg,” *Auschwitz: Beginning of A New Era?*, Eva Fleischner, ed., op. cit., pp. 57–64, esp., p. 62.
36. Jacob Neusner, “Implications of The Holocaust,” *Understanding Jewish Theology: Moral Issues and Modern Perspectives*, Jacob Neusner, ed. (New York: KTAV, 1973), p.192.
37. Neusner, “Implications of the Holocaust,” *ibid.*, p. 193.
38. Neusner, “Implications of the Holocaust,” *loc cit.*
39. Michael Wyschogrod, “Faith and the Holocaust,” op. cit., p. 288.
40. Op. cit., p. 293-294.
41. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*, op. cit., pp.76-77
42. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*, op. cit., p. 26,
43. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*, op. cit., p. 33.
44. G. Earnest Wright and Reginald H. Fuller, *The Book of the Acts of God* (New York: Doubleday Anchor books, 1960), for a lucid presentation of the conventional theology of the active God of history.

45. Cohen explicitly acknowledges his debt to Richard L. Rubenstein in forcing a “reversal in my own thinking” when Rubenstein reacted to Cohen’s earlier book, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew*, by arguing that it was the construction of a “modern theology without dealing with evil, either in itself or in its horrific manifestation as *tremendum*.” Cohen’s “reversal” took the form of a new book, *The Tremendum: A Theological Interpretation of the Holocaust*, op. cit., See p. 35 for Cohen’s remarks on Rubenstein. A thoughtful summary of the struggles of Jewish thinkers to think about God, in view of Auschwitz, is to be found in Alan L. Berger, “Holocaust and History,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 25, 2 (spring, 1988), 194–211. Also see the fine critical study of Steven T. Katz, *Post Holocaust dialogues: Critical Studies In Modern Jewish Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1985).
46. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*, op. cit., p. 97.
47. See Nicholas Berdyaev. *The Destiny of Man*, pp. 23–44.
48. Charles Hartshorne makes this point vigorously in his book, *A Natural Theology For Our Time* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1967) pp. 74–89.
49. Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Destiny of Man*, op. cit., pp. 23–44.
50. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*, op. cit., p. 34.
51. Arthur A. Cohen, *The Tremendum*, op. cit., pp. 97–98.
52. James F. Moore, “A Spectrum of Views: Traditional Christian Responses to the Holocaust,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 25, 2 (spring, 1988), pp. 212–224. In a probing essay, the American Lutheran theologian James F. Moore, examines the writings on the Holocaust of several prominent Christian theologians: Dorothy Solle, Paul van Buren, Rosemary Ruether, David Tracy, Franklin Littell, and Roy Eckardt. Moore, correctly (in my view), sees that any full acknowledgment of the Holocaust calls into question the traditional Christian message of Jesus Christ’s resurrection and redemption. Most instructive in his analysis is his questioning of the theological repositioning that one finds in the theologies of Ruether and Eckhardt. For other Christian theological efforts to respond to the Holocaust see, *Holocaust Theology: a Reader*, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed. (New York: New York Press, 2002). See also *Contemporary Christian Religious Responses to the Shoah*, Steven L. Jacobs, ed. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993).
53. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.
54. See Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.



*The Churches and Hitler:  
Was There Church Resistance to Nazi Anti-Jewish Policy?*

I

The Holocaust might never have occurred if Nazi racial ideology had not succeeded in transforming the traditional medieval church symbol of Jew as Christ-killer into the alien racial element in the body of the German *Volk*, and further transformed the *alien* Jew into the *bacterial* Jew whose elimination was needed to preserve the health of the Volk. Looking back on the Holocaust from the perspective of a half-century, certain things now seem clear: there was no exact causal step-by-step connection between Nazi racial ideology and the genocidal events we call the Holocaust. Yet, what we may be sure of, enough ordinary Germans, who did not necessarily subscribe to Nazi race thinking, had sufficient suspicion of Jews as an troublesome non-Christian people — an alien people not truly belonging to the German Volk — that, once the decision for actual genocide was made, the road from racism to genocide was shortened.<sup>1</sup>

The question before us in this chapter is what responsibility is borne by the churches of Germany for the Holocaust. While it is true that many Protestant and Catholic church leaders of Germany did not embrace Nazi race thinking, the question is outstanding: Did those leaders by their apathy, or indifference, or cowardliness contribute to the climate of thinking that made it possible for vast numbers of ordinary lay German Christians to support the Nazi movement, particularly in its early stages after the movement achieved electoral success? Did the same failure of Christian church leadership then make it possible for the Nazi leaders to assume that they had a free hand in moving their anti-Jewish policy forward from boycott and ostracism to expulsion and deportation, eventually to ghettoization and, finally, to mass murder of the whole of Europe's Jews?

In contemplating this question consider the words of Protestant Pastor Wilhelm Niemöller, written in the spirit of repentance:

We watched the synagogues being burnt. We saw our Jewish

fellow-citizens robbed of their possessions and deported without having, in conformity with the Word of the Lord, afforded them proof of our neighborliness and ventured our lives on their behalf. How could we have been so blind as to be prepared to cry out for our own congregations and Church, but not for those fallen into the hands of murderers? We should have known that Jesus hates nothing so much as pious self-interest.<sup>2</sup>

“How could we have been so blind?” Before taking up the behavior of the German Protestant churchmen we should remember that Germany in 1933 was a profoundly Christian Country of 600 million, 400 million Protestants and 200 million Catholics. Jews were a miniscule fraction of the general population, less than 1% or 500,000. Protestant and Catholic church leaders exercised considerable influence on the policies and practices of government. That influence did not disappear with the ascension to power of Hitler and his National Socialist party. This was especially true in the early years of the Nazi ascendancy to power, when Hitler and the party eagerly sought national and international support.

Ferdinand Friedensburg may be right to say that Adolph Hitler was “entirely indifferent about religion and church;” but he (Hitler) was far from indifferent about the challenge posed by the Protestant and Catholic churches to the building of the Nazi party and to winning popular support for its message. Hitler, the skilled propagandist, was also Hitler the pragmatic realist, willing to tailor the Nazi message to the social and religious realities of the German people. In that respect Hitler understood something that eluded many of his more fanatic followers: the Nazi vision of a “new Aryan Germany” had to incorporate and not contradict the values of Christian piety, political conservatism, and patriotic nationalism embraced by the vast majority of ordinary Protestant and Catholic Germans.<sup>3</sup>

The legitimacy of the power, achieved through legal, electoral and parliamentary means, conferred a new respectability on the Nazi party and, in turn, caused masses of ordinary Germans to discount instances of violent extremisms demonstrated by the SA Brownshirt recruits. Nazi propaganda also effectively exploited the genuine and popular German fears of a Soviet Germany coming into being following the humiliating loss of territory at the Versailles conference, of a spreading Red revolution, and the inflationary economic collapse of 1929. Peter Hoffman makes the

point that “the two major churches at first reacted favorably or passively to Hitler’s government. Their leaders, too, like so many others, either did not understand the nature of the new regime, or were too inert, or both.” Having said this, Hoffman adds that, nevertheless, there was native German opposition to Hitler in the early years of his Nazi rule.

... it is attested by the hundreds of thousands of German citizens, including hundreds of clergymen, who filled the concentration camps, long before Jews, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Gypsies, Belgians, Jehovah’s witness, and countless others found themselves there.

But Hoffman must conclude:

Yet at no time during Hitler’s twelve years of power did a majority of Germans resist or actively oppose or even passively the Socialist government and its major policies.<sup>4</sup>

William Sheridan Allen has insight into the moral question about Christian resistance to the Hitler regime, when he writes:

The particular tragedy of the Third Reich was not that there were insufficient martyrs or even insufficient heroes. It was that the objective circumstances demanded men who combined moral insight with practical determination. Ironically, the men of determination were too obsessed with morality to be practical while the guardians of morality determined to be practical even at the expense of morality. In this sense subjective factors were as significant as objective circumstances in inhibiting resistance to Nazi Germany.<sup>5</sup>

To underscore his point Allen observes that “...the most ironic statistic of the Third Reich ...as that more Catholic priests and Protestant ministers died in the German army than were put into concentration camps: from an actuarial point of view it was safer to oppose Hitler than to support him.”<sup>6</sup>

## II

The Protestant clergy posed a more difficult problem to the Nazi leadership. The Protestant clergy was drawn from the old conservative Prussian family elites who tended to look down on the less-than-respectable young

Germans drawn to the Nazi movement. These young Germans came from the rural areas, from schools, and from masses of ordinary unemployed middle-class people disaffected from society by the economic depression of the late 1920s. These youth were early recruits to the SA Brownshirt formations. Hitler's anti-Bolshevik message might be approved by the elite as a stalwart defense of traditional German nationalism, but Hitler himself, and the National Socialist party he led, were shunned by most of the Protestant clergy elite. However, what was shunned in the 1920s was warmly embraced after 1933 when the party came to power, acquired the aura of legitimacy, and many Protestant and Catholic lay Christians along with their clergy found a reason to openly support the "new order."<sup>7</sup>

Two further observations should be made for an accurate assessment of the behavior of the churches in the Nazi period. First, Hitler's anti-Jewish tirades were not altogether convincing to the overwhelming numbers of Germans who had largely come to accept normal relations with Jews for more than 100 years. There was certainly anti-Semitism in Germany but no greater degree of it than there was in other Western European countries like France or England. German anti-Semitism was "moderate," to use Yehuda Bauer's term. Bauer writes:

The Jews were a rather unpopular minority, well known yet strange, certainly not considered Germans (contrary to the self-perception of the Jews themselves), and people generally would hardly object if they were removed from the German economy, culture, and government administration. In fact, it was fairly widely believed that Germany might gain from their removal.<sup>8</sup>

Jews themselves also appreciated the normalization of their relations with gentile Germans, which helps explain why few German Jews were unwilling to uproot themselves and leave their native country, even after Nazi sponsored anti-Jewish policies were manifested in boycotts of Jewish businesses and in the ending of civil rights formalized in the Nuremberg laws of 1935. The wide-spread German Jewish feeling was that the Nazi party, and its openly expressed hostility toward Jews, was like a bad wind that would pass in time, giving way to a more hospitable government. This feeling arose from the unique sense of security most German Jews felt about their lives in Germany. Israeli historian Yisrael Gutman cites with approval the



observation of Ludwig Bamberger, "The Jews did not reach, nor even approximate, so great a measure of a common life and identification with any people as they did with the Germans. They were thoroughly 'Germanized' not only in Germany but far beyond its borders."<sup>9</sup>

The second observation is based on the fact that in the beginning those who were drawn to Hitler's anti-Semitism were a few hundred convinced Nazis, who shared Hitler's vision of a new racially pure Germany, cleansed of Jews. That number would grow considerably as the Nazi movement gained popular approval. Any explanation of how Nazi anti-Jewish policies could and did develop into a program of deportations and exterminations must take into account that the majority Protestant population and the large Catholic minority showed themselves largely indifferent to what the Nazi regime was preaching against Jews. This is extraordinary when we consider that the German people as a whole did not particularly like Jews, but also did not have active animosity against them: nor did Germans have any particular liking of the Nazi regime, until its electoral and political successes could not be ignored — whereupon party membership multiplied greatly.<sup>10</sup>

Indifference then, more than anything else, explains why the churches were silent in the face of the actual Nazi treatment of Jews, once Hitler and his party came to power. In the early years Nazi party leaders were unsure of what they wanted to do with the Jews removed from their positions. Undoubtedly, many ordinary Germans identified with the Nazi movement in the hope of gaining position from the removal of Jews. The expressions of protest and outrage at Nazi anti-Jewish actions were the exception. Such were individuals or small organizations reacting to the excesses of Nazi practices, especially in the wake of *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November, 1938.<sup>11</sup>

Where Nazi race policy drew the criticism of Christian officials, the issue usually involved converted Jews. This occurred in the opposition to efforts of Nazi officials to apply the racial laws to Jewish spouses of Aryan Germans, laws that would have made the spouses subject to deportation. Nazi policies that sought to prevent Protestant and Catholic clergy from accepting and ministering to Jewish converts were also opposed by Christian leaders.<sup>12</sup>

Where the object of anti-Jewish Nazi policy was not baptized Jews, or Jewish spouses of Aryan Germans, the churches made few protests. The

churches' silence before Nazi treatment of Jews lessened when we remember how Christian leaders, like Archbishops Galen of Munster and Preysing of Berlin, spoke up sharply against the regime's euthanasia program after some 70,000 to 100,000 invalids and infirm had been killed, even while the program continued secretly, claiming another 30,000 victims. The widespread consternation caused by the program among the general population and by high-ranking Protestant and Catholic clerics who spoke out forced a change in official Nazi policy.<sup>13</sup>

It is important to say here that the moral reputation of the Christian churches in Nazi-governed Germany would be judged differently today if church leaders had followed the example of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople who "sent a note to all Bishops in the Balkans and in Central Europe, enjoining them to help the Jews with all the means in their power and to proclaim in the churches that concealing Jews was a sacred duty."<sup>14</sup>

### III

In the first months of the 1933 Nazi assumption of power, Hitler and other Nazi leaders proceeded carefully so as not to alienate the German public. Looking back from the perspective of more than a half century one can say that in the first months of Nazi rule there was a fertile time in which the Protestant Church leaders could have acted to influence the government's racial policies. But the opportunity was missed because, as Richard Gutteridge notes, "the vast majority of the church leaders and the clergy serving under them were eager to enter into the new order and to make their positive contribution there."<sup>15</sup> With this attitude the behavior of the Nazi government toward the Jews was not a major concern in the popular mind. And when German Protestant leaders failed to achieve a common resolution with their American counterparts condemning anti-Semitism, Nazi leaders were reassured that no domestic or international opposition would come from the Nazi government's anti-Jewish policies.<sup>16</sup>

If there is any doubt of this consider the case of influential Protestant churchman Otto Dibelius. Pastor Dibelius accepted the Nazi doctrine of a God-given *Volkstum*, on behalf of which he justified the early Nazi boycott of Jewish goods in a radio broadcast to the U.S. Of course, Otto Dibelius would not have approved the mass murder of Jews; but when there was

time for the far-sighted to have spoken against Nazi anti-Jewish policies, no opposition came from Dibelius or from any major Protestant or Catholic leader. How could it when many if those leaders were at best ambivalent about the place of Jews in German society? Dibelius made no secret of his own feelings toward Jews, whom he regarded as responsible "for all the manifestations of disintegrations in modern civilizations."<sup>17</sup>

Consider also the case of Theophil Wurm who, together with Dibelius, was one of the two most influential Protestant clerics in Germany. Wurm, bishop of the prestigious Wurttemberg Church, had actually wanted to oppose the anti-Jewish boycott of April 1, 1933, but heeded the warnings of a Berlin church bureaucrat who cautioned that openly stated opposition would only harm relations between the Protestant churches and the government. Thus the dilemma faced by many German Protestant clergymen, that of wanting to oppose the excesses of the Nazi government, while respecting the legitimacy of that government. It is important to add that Nazi anti-Jewish policy was seen by most Protestant leaders as a political matter not a religious issue directly confronting their Christian conscience. As a direct consequence of this attitude, there was no real Protestant Christian opposition to the Nazi government's declaration that status of Jews was to be determined not by religion, but by race and blood as would be set forth by the Nuremberg legislation in 1935.<sup>18</sup>

On May 6, 1933 the new Reich Church was born. This church of German Christians was intended to overcome the autonomy of twenty-eight Protestant church jurisdictions and unify Protestant Germany around the Nazi ideals of one new Aryan Germany. So, not surprisingly, when the General Synod of the Prussian church adopted the exclusive Aryan clause for all its clergy and officials, many Protestant churches followed suit.<sup>19</sup> But not all did. There was a dissenting opposition that came to be called the Confessing Church. This was a new organization composed of those Protestant clergy who rejected the Aryan clause as they rejected the politicization of German Protestantism under the Nazi government.

The reaction on the part of many dissenting Protestants was explicitly theological: the Aryan paragraph was viewed as a "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," calling into question the validity of baptism, making nonsense of ordination, and further compromising the "cardinal doctrine of the justification by faith alone." The Aryan paragraph was opposed because the dissenters correctly saw that what lay behind the paragraph was the

exclusion of non-Aryans from the life and worship of the church.<sup>20</sup> But the opposition of the Confessing Church proved weak because it never directly challenged the Nazi racially based anti-Jewish policy. The line was never drawn between the Nazi Government and the Confessing German pastors. The reason (as said earlier) was that the Jewish question was seen essentially as a political and not a religious question confronting Christian conscience.

The concern about Jews was largely confined to Jews who had converted to Protestant Christians or were spouses of Protestants. The Confessing Christians were ambivalent about non-converted Jews. An example of this ambivalence was Martin Niemöller, whose initiative brought the Confessing Church into being. Martin (the brother of the repentant Wilhelm Niemöller quoted above) had this to say about non-converted Jews: "We as a nation have been made to suffer considerably under the influence of the Jewish people. It is a matter of real self-denial to champion their cause."<sup>21</sup>

It was the ambivalence of those, like Dibelius, Wurm and Niemöller, who spoke for many Protestants in their attitude towards Jews, that prompted this melancholy observation of author Richard Gutteridge: "... how splendid it would have been if a Christian voice had been raised challenging the whole Aryan/non-Aryan nonsense. But no voice was raised, no Protestant voice and no Catholic voice."<sup>22</sup>

What, then, did the Confessing Church accomplish? The answer is that the Protestant dissenters accomplished at best a merely symbolic act of protest against the systematic and successful efforts of Nazi leaders to convince the majority of Protestant clergy that the future of Germany lay with their vision of an Aryan Christianity and not with the "dissenters" — parishioners, pastors, and theologians — that comprised the Confessing Church.

Both the idealism and failures of the Confessing Church are embodied in the activities of Bishop Wurm. Wurm matched the courage of his Catholic counterpart, Archbishop Clement August von Galen, who vigorously protested the euthanasia program. Wurm, like other influential clergy, became aware of the mass murder of Jews from the time of the German invasion of the U.S.S.R. But what did Wurm do? Adhering to the traditional Lutheran doctrine of the "two kingdoms," he chose not to mix religion with politics and carried out his opposition to German war policy

through memoranda alone. Wurm's opposition, like the whole dissenting Confessing Church, was in its way courageous but politically limited, and ultimately inconsequential.<sup>23</sup>

Had Wurm really wanted to challenge Nazi policies he would have accepted and not rejected, as he did, the request of his pastoral colleague Hermann Diem "that on a given Sunday a frank and open statement on the Jewish question should be read from all Wurtemberg's pulpits."<sup>24</sup> For someone of Bishop Wurm's stature (even Hitler deferred respectfully to his authority), such a public airing of the "Jewish question" might have had a material affect on Nazi policy with regard to Jews, irrespective of whether or not those Jews happened to be converted Christians.

How strikingly different from the ambivalence of Dibelius, Niemöller, and Wurm was the open-hearted embrace of non-Aryan Christians on the part of Pastor Heinrich Grubbe. I quote from Gutteridge's account:

It was Heinrich Grubbe above all who proved in 1939 to 1940 to be the champion of the non-Aryan Christians. In the mansion on the Stechbahn, close to the Berlin Schloss, which he acquired and managed to staff adequately and mainly with non-Aryan helpers, he set up his relief organization which was tolerated, if not approved, by the Nazi authorities. The main purpose was clearly that of emigration by various means, but at the same time much cheer and comfort was afforded to the bewildered and terrified callers. The Grubbe office became welfare service, consulate, legal aid bureau, health department and spiritual power-house, all rolled into one, and branch offices were in due course established in a number of provincial centers. Grubbe's organization continued to function only for a short time after his arrest in December 1940, but it was not the end of his relief work. A number of his colleagues carried on in clandestine fashion. As devout Christians they had to deceive the authorities, smother their consciences and learn the ugly technique of trickery, lies and forgery and be prepared to keep company with criminals and conspire with corruptible elements within the Gestapo. Few of them escaped with their lives. One who survived, Gertrud Staewen, testified that they did not merely concern themselves about the wearers of the Star whom they saw sitting in the Church pew, the last real home left to them. They sought to serve any person of Jewish extraction.<sup>25</sup>

## IV

The penetration and compromising of the Protestant churches of Germany could be traced to a Nazi strategy to force changes in Protestant church organization in the belief that such changes would render the German Protestant churches more accommodating of the Nazi party and its policies. This strategy (as noted) was aimed at the reorganization of the twenty-eight Protestant districts into one *Reichskirche* under one bishop elected by National Socialist pastors and confirmed by Hitler. As an integral part of the Nazification of German Protestantism, a campaign was introduced to alter the traditional Protestant confession of faith by neo-pagan language influenced by the writings of anti-Christian theologian, Alfred Rosenberg. In place of traditional confessions of sin, guilt, and redemption through the suffering Christ a new "Positive Christianity" was substituted based on blood and soil and faith in the Fuhrer Hitler. We are indebted to the ground-breaking research of the late Uriel Tal, who has shown how Nazi ideology functioned as a "substitute religion" that would necessarily conflict with both traditional Lutheran Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.<sup>26</sup>

Tal demonstrates that, from the beginning, Hitler defined Nazism in *Mein Kampf* as a "political faith," a new kind of faith with the potency to redeem all Germans from the humiliations of the past and reunite them as a new and strong *Volksgemeinschaft*. No one had more confidence to mold and wield this *Volksgemeinschaft* than Adolph Hitler himself who (according to Tal) "...presented himself simultaneously as an eschatological savior and a sober political leader."<sup>27</sup>

The energy fueling Nazism ideology was race, the Aryan or Nordic race divinely destined to exercise its supremacy throughout Europe. Martin Bormann, one of Hitler's closest advisors, so fervently embraced Nazi race ideology that he opposed any accommodation with the churches, which he (Bormann) saw as the poisoned progeny of their mother, Judaism. Unlike Bormann, Hitler — no less an anti-Semite than Bormann, but less fervent and vastly shrewder — never allowed his own racial *Weltanschauung* to interfere with political considerations. Hitler understood, as few of his more passionate Nazi colleagues understood, that if Germany were to build and deploy a new powerful army of thousands of conscripts, those conscripts had to be drawn from German Catholic and Protestant families.

It would only do great harm to Nazi goals and his own ambitions were German Christians religiously alienated from the Nazi movement. Hitler was the first to see that there was a limit to the imposition of Rosenberg's neo-pagan ideas and symbols onto traditional German Protestantism and Catholicism.<sup>28</sup>

Where Nazi ideologists were successful was in inculcating the belief that the Jew was the demonic presence that had to be removed so that the goals of the Aryan *Volksgemeinschaft* could be achieved. In its racially-rooted ideology Nazi anti-Semitism traded on but also went substantially beyond traditional popular German Christian anti-Semitism. The stress on blood and soil and nature meant that the Jew, seen as a product of Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism, could not have a place in the Nazi vision of a Germany reborn as *Volksgemeinschaft*. The Jew could assimilate into Germany and the Jew who believes he has assimilated, also must be removed as a corrupting alien presence. Tal shows how the Aryan ideology of Nazism was embodied in the symbol of the *Volk*, a symbol that automatically generated the counter symbol of the Jew as the anti-*Volk*. Because of this way of thinking, Nazism became a religious substitute to its most fanatic adherents for both German Protestantism and Catholicism. To fanatic, anti-Christian Nazis the Fuhrer played a crucial role as the one who embodied the *Volk* principle.

The mythical concept of a divinely destined Aryan race made pure and victorious by a no less mythical concept of the alien Jew was advanced relentlessly and brilliantly by Nazi ideologues. Those ideologues were sympathetically heard by a great number of Germans, particularly German youth, because despite its many irrational absurdities anti-Jewish race ideology effectively connected with traditional Christian religious disdain of the "Christ-killing Jew." Thus, as said at the outset, the Nazis succeeded brilliantly in converting the symbol of the alien Jew into a vehicle for the actual removal and eventual annihilation of the Jew.<sup>29</sup>

## V

Catholics comprised about one-third of Germany's Christian population. While Nazi ideologues had substantial success in imposing the National Socialist religion of "Positive Christianity," on German Protestant churches, they had no success in doing the same with German Catholicism,

which retained its beliefs and rituals throughout the Nazi period. Having said this, one must hasten to add that German Catholicism, no less than German Protestantism, capitulated to National Socialism by adhering to the *Reichskonkordat*, signed with the Vatican in 1933, soon after Hitler came to power. The Concordat assured German Catholics of a formal semi-autonomy, particularly in ritual practices and the administration of Catholic schools, clubs, press, monasteries and convents. In exchange for this autonomy the Catholic Church did not stand in the way of the Nazi political movement, and through the Concordat acknowledged the legitimacy of the Nazi government brought into being by the will of the German electorate.

Nevertheless, just as the outspoken racial agenda of the Nazi party created acute problems for the theology of Catholic bishops, the Nazi leaders, in pressing their racial agenda, found themselves repeatedly violating the terms of the Concordat. A struggle ensued over who would prevail over German Catholics: Hitler or the bishops. The pope and the Vatican were often caught in the middle, especially so since the initiative for the Concordat had come out of the Vatican. Common ground was found only in the anti-Communist policy pursued by the Nazis. This policy encouraged the Vatican to think that, despite Nazi racial ideology, the Vatican and German Catholic leaders could co-operate with Hitler and his government.

The struggle between the Nazi party leadership and the Catholic bishops continued from 1933 to 1939 and the German invasion of Poland. With the German aggression into Poland, the German bishops went silent. Only passivity (*i.e.* the absence of moral courage) explains the unwillingness of Pope Pius XII and the German Catholic bishops to condemn the wholesale murder of Catholic priests and laymen in Poland and the subsequent slaughter of Orthodox Serbs in Croatia at the hands of Catholics under the Ustasha regime. The Church's failure at this time dramatizes its silence in regard to the genocide of Europe's Jews. For when the Catholic Church failed to condemn the mass murder of its own fellow-Christians, one would not then have expected Catholic leadership to condemn the annihilation of Jews.

To understand this extraordinary cowardliness of the Catholic Church at the highest official levels one must recognize how Paul's injunction to "let every person be subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1, RSV) was twisted grotesquely out of shape." Let us remember that Hitler's



aim in 1939 was to invade Poland to acquire more space (*lebensraum*) for the expansion of the German nation. "This meant, quite simply, the end of Poland," as Michael Phayer correctly observes in his superbly researched and written study of the Catholic Church and the Holocaust.<sup>30</sup>

The action of the Nazi anti-Polish attack involved the wholesale murder of Polish elite — professionals, politicians, priests, and military officers — leaving ordinary Polish workers and peasants to serve as slave laborers. The result of the Nazi occupation of Poland was the loss of six million Poles during the war years due to "prisons, death camps, raids, executions, annihilation of ghettos, epidemics, starvation, excessive work and ill-treatment."<sup>31</sup> The occupying German government put severe restrictions on the religious practices of Polish Catholics.

"... the churches are profaned or closed, religion is scorned, worship ceases, bishops are driven from their sees, hundreds of priests are dead or imprisoned, nuns are in the hands of spoiled depraved thieves, innocent hostages are murdered almost daily before the eyes of children, people are dying of hunger, and the pope keeps silent as if what happens to his flock doesn't concern him."<sup>32</sup>

"...and the pope keeps silent." The Pope at this time was Eugenio Pacelli, who ascended to the papal throne in March 1939, months before the German invasion of Poland commenced. Historian Phayer calls Pacelli (who had served first as nuncio to Germany and later as Vatican Secretary of State) a man of "tunnel vision," a pure diplomat who, for all his political skills, lacked the moral sensitivity of an ordinary Christian. It was this man, the professional diplomat, who ordered his subordinate Nuncio Cesare Orsenigo to congratulate Germany's chancellor warmly and publicly on Adolph Hitler's 50th birthday.<sup>33</sup> It was also this Pope who personally tore up the draft of a Vatican denunciation of the Nazi government for sending to their deaths in extermination centers Jewish-Catholic converts in Holland. We should not be surprised to learn that Pacelli's closest advisors were German-born Catholics, not the least of whom was Orsenigo himself, whom Thayer describes as a "pro-German, pro-Nazi, antisemitic fascist."<sup>34</sup>

There is little evidence to support the thesis that Pacelli personally was in any way sympathetic to Hitler's political and racial policies. He was not *Hitler's Pope*, as the title of a sensationalistic book by John Cornwell

suggests. One might overlook Cornwell's hyperbole when we recognize that Pacelli, during his years as nuncio to Germany, acquired a love of the German nation, people, and culture that seemed, in conducting church affairs, to blind him to a Nazi government that he may never have approved of, and may even have personally deplored, but a government to which he deferred consistently to his death.<sup>35</sup>

We may readily accept that as a life-long diplomat, with proven diplomatic and administrative skills, Pacelli saw his role as a strategist for retaining Catholic Church autonomy in the face of Nazi power. If Hitler's strategy from the beginning was to render the German Catholic Church (like the Protestant churches) subservient to his will, then the counter-strategy of Eugenio Pacelli, first as nuncio to Germany, later as Vatican Secretary of State, and finally as Pius XII, was to resist subservience by a policy of deliberate and consistent deference to Nazi political and military power. At best it was a policy of "rendering unto Caesar." Vatican policy under Pacelli/Pius XII would defer to the Nazi government and in exchange the Church would be granted through the *Reichskonkordat* of July 1933, administrative and religious semi-autonomy — a Concordat which Pacelli (as nuncio) himself negotiated in 1933 with Hitler and the Nazi government. The end result of Pacelli's strategy was to purchase a functional semi-autonomy for the Catholic church in Germany at the cost of officially recognizing and practically cooperating with a government that directly brought about the death of millions of Christian and non-Christian human beings. The last word here is that throughout the Nazi period the Concordat was never revoked by the German Catholic church, and at no time did the German Catholic Church urge its millions of adherents to withhold support of the Nazi government.<sup>36</sup>

## VI

The Pacelli strategy, embodied in the *Reichskonkordat*, was successful for the Church because the Nazi government was restrained from seizing Catholic properties, did not prevent priests from administering sacraments, did not prevent the traditional Catholic mission to the conversion of the Jew, and did not enforce the government's own prohibition against "mixed marriages." Because of the *Reichskonkordat* Catholic bishops withdrew their planned condemnation of National Socialism. As a consequence, Catholic

institutions — publications, schools, and clubs — continued to receive state subsidy throughout the Nazi period. The *Reichskonkordat* was an immensely important document that effectively emasculated any potential clerical or lay German Catholic opposition to Nazi policies. What opposition did occur came from individuals or small groups acting on their own out of conscience.

In 1939, when he became pope, Pacelli's nightmare was that Bolshevism would triumph over Nazism, leading to the communization of Western Europe and the eclipse of the Catholic Church in the face of the atheistic Soviet Union. The case has been convincingly made that uppermost in the mind of Pacelli/Pius XII was the threat posed by Bolshevism. Because of Bolshevism, he and his advisors were willing to tolerate, if not ignore the moral questions raised by the expansion of Nazi power made dramatically evident in the German invasion and occupation of Poland from the first day of September 1939. Pacelli's calculation was that, however repulsive the actions of Nazi Germany, it was better to throw the Church's support behind Hitler lest he be defeated and thereby open Europe's door to communism.<sup>37</sup>

This was Pacelli's strategy prior to the breaking of the secret Ribbentrop-Molotov mutual non-aggression pact that cleared the way for Germany's invasion of Poland. Once the pact was broken by Germany's invasion of Russia in June 1941 (sixteen months after the invasion of Poland), Pacelli was confronted with a new and more volatile situation than the one he faced when he sided with Germany against the U.S.S.R.: the *Reichskonkordat* of 1933 put the Vatican of 1941 formally at odds with the Allied powers, including the U.S.S.R., in their common cause against Hitler.

It was at the point of the crucial battle at Stalingrad, the battle that stopped the German military advance into Russia, that Pacelli (now Pius XII) may have made the worst political blunder of his career. Accepting the obvious risks for Catholicism in Germany, he could have renounced the *Reichskonkordat* and thrown the weight of the Church behind the Allies, a move wanted by Allied leaders. This (in my personal judgment) is where historian Thayer's reference to Pacelli's "tunnel vision" is most apt. "Tunnel vision" is a failure to make adjustments and change directions when called for by new and different events. Stalingrad was just such an event; Pacelli refused to read the signs of a changing military situation. Frozen in his posture as a life-long skilled diplomat he had naïvely convinced himself that he would still be called on as a neutral mediator by both Germany and the

Allies in any post-war settlement. The Allied insistence on “Unconditional Surrender” from Germany and Japan would show just how naïve the Pope’s thinking was.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Pacelli underestimated Hitler’s ambitions and ruthlessness so he overestimated his own skills in diplomatically solving the problems posed by Nazi government’s rule of Germany, problems that became ever more acute as the European war commenced with the invasion of Poland. In 1937, two years before the invasion of Poland, Pacelli’s predecessor, Pius XI (Achille Ratti) issued the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, which condemned racism generally without mentioning Jews as a primary target of racism, and without naming Hitler as the leader under whom Nazi anti-Jewish racial policy was conducted. This rebuke, mild as it was, of the Nazi government nonetheless outraged Berlin. No one was more attuned to Nazi feeling than Pius XI’s Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli. So it was not surprising that one year later, in the November pogrom of 1938 (*Kristallnacht*), Pacelli saw to it that no encyclical condemning the pogrom was issued; he did the same with regard to Dutch bishops protesting the roundup and deportation of Dutch Jews. Apparently, for him it seemed that any Vatican criticism would have harmed relations between the Nazi government and the Vatican.<sup>39</sup>

One should also note that Pacelli as Vatican Secretary of State was viewed as the likely successor to Pius XI, who was near dead when *Kristallnacht* occurred. Clearly Pius XI was a very different person in sensitivity and outlook from the man who would soon replace him as Pope Pius XII. This became dramatically clear when Italy’s racial laws were decreed almost simultaneously with the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. Where Pacelli chose to disregard the laws, Pius XI (Ratti) reacted with negative emotion: “Why Italy was disgracefully imitating Germany.”<sup>40</sup>

Any comparison of the policies pursued by Pius XI (Ratti) with those of Pius XII (Pacelli) will show that Pacelli’s actions actually reversed the decisions made by his predecessor, for with the issuance of the encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, Pius XI was “inching towards” an outright censure of Nazi anti-Semitism. This censure was intended in the planned encyclical, as *Humani Generis Unitas* (see below). But, the encyclical was never sent because the pope was discouraged from issuing statement by none other than his top diplomatic advisor, Eugenio Pacelli. In any event the Pope died before he could sign the encyclical. The succession from Pius XI

to Pius XII meant that diplomacy would take precedence over justice in papal priorities.

Despite the position taken by the Vatican under Pius XII, the German Catholic bishops themselves were not without power and influence among the 200 million Catholics of Germany. With the accession to power of the National Socialist party in 1933, the major question the bishops faced was who among them was willing to stick out his neck to openly criticize the Nazi government, risk the disfavor of Rome, and lose influence with the government in Berlin? There were a few — Preysing of Berlin, Galen of Muenster, Frings of Freiburg — who did show courage, but most bishops were not willing to risk offending the Nazi government by taking a stand against anti-Jewish and increasingly anti-Catholic measures. Even in the face of repeated Nazi violations of its terms, most bishops accepted the *Reichskonkordat* as a not-to-be-questioned Vatican policy directive, the basis of a *modus vivendi* for Catholic/Nazi co-existence.

Ever since 1870, when the dogma of papal infallibility was proclaimed, the world-wide Catholic episcopacy had grown accustomed to a dominant papacy and a centralized church authority. For that very reason, had the Pope spoken out against Nazi actions against Jews, against Christians, against a common humanity, the Pope's example would have certainly had a powerful affect on the German bishops forcing them away from the cautious neutrality called for by the *Reichskonkordat*. But this did not happen.

None was more compliant with Vatican directives than the Dean of the German Catholic bishops, Cardinal Bertram of Breslau. Bertram shared Pacelli's strategy of taking a wholly diplomatic approach to Nazi Germany. Following Bertram's lead, the vast majority of German bishops were not willing to risk the semi-autonomy they enjoyed by criticizing or openly opposing the Nazi government, even when the government engaged in morally reprehensible behavior.

Perhaps the outstanding exception was Archbishop August Galen of Muenster; Galen was so incensed by the Nazi euthanasia program that he condemned it repeatedly in sermons until it was officially discontinued. In doing so Galen showed that a personal act of moral courage on the part of an influential Catholic cleric was not without an effect on Nazi policy. Archbishops Preysing of Berlin and Frings of Freiberg continually urged Bertram to adopt a more openly critical stance against the excesses of Nazi government. Had the outspoken independence of Galen, Preysing,

Grubber, and Frings been matched by several dozen more Catholic bishops and their Protestant counterparts, it is possible that such a manifestation of official opposition might have had an affect on Nazi policies. We cannot be certain of this, but we do know that Hitler and the Nazi leadership were never immune to public criticism, especially when the international press took notice.<sup>42</sup>

## VII

As for Eugenio Pacelli, an experienced diplomat, he fell into the diplomatic trap of assuming that making no decision was as good as making a decision. This attitude accounts for Pacelli's temporizing, his propensity to rationalization expressed through the Latin maxim, *ad maiora mala vitanda* ("to avoid worse evil"). He frequently used this expression to explain why he would not speak out against Nazi crimes. The consideration of those crimes — the liquidation of Poles and Serbs in 1941 to the extermination of Jews in 1941–1944 — beggar the imagination. Here one must ask: How much more worse would it have been if the Pope had spoken out early, plainly, decisively, courageously to condemn Nazi crimes? We now know that there was no ignorance of Nazi crimes. Documents show that the British envoy to the Vatican, Francis d'Arcy Godolphin Osborne, prepared almost daily reports for the pope about atrocities that Nazi Germany was committing against Jews.<sup>43</sup>

The Vatican had ample and accurate knowledge of mass murders to be carried out against Jews under Nazi racial policy from the time of the German invasion of the U.S.S.R. in June 1941. We also know that it was a Vatican practice to suppress this knowledge, keeping German bishops and world church leaders in ignorance. In this regard Walter Laqueur writes that: "Word about the murder of the Jews spread with startling quickness throughout Europe and even across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States. Vatican officials, including the Pope, were the first, or among the first, to learn about the Holocaust."<sup>44</sup>

In addition to keeping the German bishops and world church leaders in ignorance, the Jews were prevented from knowing what was happening to their brethren in the east. Phayer conjectures that Jews would have eluded death camps if the Holy See had accelerated information on genocide. He writes:

Pius XII's priorities put Jews at mortal risk. Thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of additional Jews would have eluded Hitler's camps had the Holy See accelerated rather than decelerated information about genocide. Did Pope Pius think the church so fragile that should he speak out, it would not survive the war, even though it had survived the fratricidal Great War intact? Should the possible bombardment of Rome have been Pius's moral concern, or, as Bishop Preysing pointed out, should not the moral issue of the murder of the Jews have taken precedence?<sup>45</sup>

It should be noted that Vatican Secretary of State Maglione knew of the Holocaust in the spring of 1943, but he wrote evasively to Cardinal Bertram in November of the same year concealing the facts of mass murder. Even before, in 1942, the Vatican was in full possession of the facts about the Holocaust. Just as Pius XII consistently cleaved to the strategy of saying and doing nothing to antagonize Nazi Germany during the entire course of World War II, so he consistently looked to preserve and protect his own domain of Vatican city, and by extension the city of Rome itself, from bombardment and takeover by the Germans or the Allies. The insensitivity which Pacelli showed to the round-up and deportation of Italian Jews "under his very windows" can only finally be explained as an insensitivity borne of extreme fear for his life and his property. To have expected Pacelli to act independently and without regard to life and property, to openly defy German authority, is to have expected a hero and not a professionally trained diplomat who had made a life-long career of preserving Catholic interests through compromise, irrespective of moral consequences.<sup>46</sup>

Even before 1942, the Vatican leaned of the systematic slaughter of Jews at the hands of mobile killing squads, as happened to 18,000 Jews in Kovno, Lithuania. A report of this event was written and circulated to German Catholic bishops by Margarete Sommer, a member of the Berlin Catholic Resistance circle and a close associate of Konrad Preysing, Catholic Bishop of Berlin. Officially, the report never reached the eyes of the Pope in Rome because it was never meant to do so. Vatican attitudes towards Germany — its government, its anti-Semitic policies (which now included mass murder) — were deemed deplorable facts that would not change an official Catholic policy that at bottom was meant to sustain a strong Germany against the threat of Bolshevism. Far better, then, for the Pope to "officially" remain

ignorant of the Kovno massacre, as of the Holocaust itself. Perhaps it is for this reason, in the face of almost daily delivered reports about actions taken against Jews by Nazi Germany, that on December 30, 1942, Pius XII told an American diplomat that stories about German atrocities against Jews were exaggerated “for the sake of propaganda.”<sup>47</sup>

A revealing footnote to the dismal connection between the Catholic Church, under Pius XII, and Nazi Germany and the Church’s silence in the face of the mass murder of Jews and countless other non-Aryans, is that the Church also remained silent during the period in which the Luftwaffe carried out its aerial bombing of England. Yet the same Pope did raise his voice later in protest when German cities were being obliterated by Allied bombers.<sup>48</sup>

If simple moral courage in the face of manifest evil is essential to integrity, then one must question the integrity of most of the German Catholic episcopacy during the Hitler years. And there is the question: Would organized Roman Catholic opposition to Nazi policy have made a difference? We will never know because there was no opposition. A most pathetic example of German Catholic moral failure is evidenced in the pattern of response to all the Jews deemed non-Aryan by Nazi racial laws. Individual bishops did speak out in behalf of Jewish converts to Catholicism, as in the effort directed by Cardinal Bertram against the policy mandating divorce between Aryan and non-Aryan Catholic spouses. Only in rare instances, however, do we find a ranking Catholic cleric speaking out against the persecution of non-Aryan Jews who were not converts to the Church. The Jews, unlike the invalid, did not find a champion for their cause like Archbishop Galen of Munster. In this regard it should be noted that in all Europe only one Catholic Bishop, Archbishop Twardowski of Poland, “forfeited his life for hiding Jews.”<sup>49</sup>

## VIII

Michael Phayer writes that the Catholic “church taught ... contempt for Jews as Christ-killers, while on the other hand it taught that murder was sinful.” Here was the essential moral ambiguity that “led Catholics to respond to the Holocaust in extreme ways — some as rescuers, but many others as Nazi collaborators.” To Phayer the rescuers are a special people because “they lived on to become the link between the Holocaust and anti-Semitism.”<sup>50</sup>



Rescuers were pitifully few in number, by one estimate only one to three percent of the Polish population participated in rescue operations. At the level of the priesthood, thousands of Catholic priests were murdered by the Nazis; many of those, such as Maximilian Kolbe and Alfred Delp, for going to the rescue of Jews. Catholic rescue efforts of Jews came mostly from women in Germany, Italy and France. German women stand out among individuals who proved especially heroic in protesting Nazi decrees by their own willingness to act in behalf of endangered Jews, irrespective of whether they were converts to Christianity. In this regard it is important to note the bravery of such women as Matylda Getter, Margit Schlacta, Gertrud Luckner, and Margarete Sommer, who warned Jews to get out of the country. One could also mention the bravery of certain organizations that risked the lives of their members by rescuing Jews, hiding them, providing for them, and issuing baptismal certificates without requiring baptism or conversion. Some of the organizations were: Caritas, Elizabeth Society, Sisters of Family of Mary, Order of Immaculate Conception, the Dominican Sisters, and *Amitie Chretienne*. We know that the Sisters of Zion got provisions for Jews in hiding through the efforts of the Pope's personal servant, Sister Pasqualini, who may not have informed the Pope of what she was doing. This courageous and compassionate service came not from the bishops but from ordinary Catholic laity moved to action by the plight of Jews.<sup>51</sup>

Again the question haunts us: Could the tyranny of Nazi Germany have been prevented or at least frustrated in the full exercise of its tyranny? The question brings us to the remarkable document which was intended for Pope Pius XI but which he never saw and never signed. Would this document coming from the Pope have mitigated Nazi tyranny? One wonders.

In 1938, at the time of the explosion of Nazi anti-Semitism in the November pogrom known as *Kristallnacht* (also the time of the Italian anti-Semitic legislation introduced by the Mussolini government), a surprising document was composed, a papal encyclical, *Humani Generis Unitas*, containing condemnation of Nazi racism and anti-Semitism. The encyclical was never published because Pope Pius XI (Achille Ratti) died before he could sign it.

An account of this document, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI*, written by Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, contains a fascinating story of the origins of the encyclical and the intrigues within the Vatican that

attended stages of its writing, as well as the reasons for its non-publication. In summary, Pius XI, repelled by the increasing anti-Jewish practices of the Nazi German government, personally commissioned a young American Jesuit priest, John La Farge, to compose a document that he, Pius XI, could send forth as a definitive statement that Nazi racial ideology and policies affecting Jews were contrary to the principles of Christianity. It seems that Pius XI was favorably impressed by reading a book of La Farge's asserting that racial division in America was contrary to revealed and natural law.<sup>52</sup>

This was not the first expression of papal displeasure with Nazi racism. In 1936, following the promulgation of the infamous Nuremberg laws making race the basis of government policy, Pius XI issued an encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge* ("With Burning Dismay"), which criticized German racial policy in the context of the Nazi government's non-compliance with the Catholic administrative autonomy guaranteed in the Concordat. The difference between this encyclical, which spoke of racism in general terms and did not mention Jews, and the latter, *Humani Generis Unitas*, was the specific naming of Jews as the target of Nazi racial policy. However, the later encyclical was not published and one can only speculate if its publication would have had any affect on Nazi racial policy and on mitigating the subservience of German Catholic bishops to the National Socialist government.

The outstanding facts are that Pius XI (who died in February 1939) was succeeded one month later by Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli as Pius XII who, well before the beginning of his career as pope, gave evidence of seeking to accommodate the German government and not confront it with condemnatory statements about its racial ideology. In high Vatican circles Pius XII was not alone in this attitude.

Passelecq and Suchecky state that, among others, Father Wladimir Ledochowski, General of the Jesuit Order, was concerned that the release of the encyclical would weaken Germany and strengthen the Soviet Union, thus ultimately endangering world Catholicism. It should also be said that, if the encyclical had appeared, it would have bestowed Vatican approval on any Catholic protest against German racism. The German Church hierarchies (Catholic and Protestant) would have been strengthened in protesting Nazi policies, as, in fact, did happen with regard to the euthanasia program.

Would promulgation of the encyclical have prevented genocide of Jews? The answer is, probably not. Nazi anti-Jewish racist thinking, including

the idea of the total elimination of the Jews, had already been mentioned in *Mein Kampf*; it was an idea repeated in Hitler's speech of 1939. But, the encyclical would have made a difference in Germany among the general population by pointing to the fact that Nazi government was a criminal government engaged in murder of innocents, whose only *crime* was that they were Jews.

The intended encyclical *Humani Generis Unitas* was a flawed document from its beginning because, while wanting to oppose Nazi anti-Semitic ideology, the document incorporated much of the church anti-Jewish disdain in speaking of "spiritual dangers to which contact with Jews can expose [Christian] souls." Yet the encyclical makes it plain that anti-Semitism as such is inadmissible because, as the Pope once said on Belgian radio, "we [Christians and Jews] are all spiritually semites."<sup>53</sup>

The document declares unequivocally that "our Catholic faith teaches us as a fundamental truth that there is one God for all men and for all races, 'the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,' (Ephesians 1:3)."<sup>54</sup> With pointed reference to the Nazi government the encyclical asserts that "the struggle for racial purity ends by being uniquely the struggle against the Jews."<sup>55</sup> Reaffirming the traditional Catholic position the document asserts that "the so-called Jewish question is not one of race or nation, or territorial nationality or citizenship in the state. It is a question of religion and, since the Coming of Christ, a question of Christianity."<sup>56</sup>

The disappearance of two documents from the desk of Pope Ratti on the night of his death in February 1939, only heightens the suspicion that there were a number of clerics of high station that thought it was better for the Vatican and for the entire Catholic church that documents that would provoke both the German and Italian governments must remain unpublished and out of sight. Among these documents were the unsigned encyclical *Humani Generis Unitas* and the speech the pope intended to give the next day on the tenth anniversary of the Lateran accords (1929) — a speech critical of the Mussolini government for introducing anti-Semitic legislation.

## Notes

1. Otto Dov Kulka, "Popular Christian Attitudes in the Third Reich to National Socialist Policies towards the Jews," *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism*, eds. Otto Dov Kulka and Paul R. Mendes-Flohr (Jerusalem: The Historical Society for Israel and the Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1987), p. 266. Otto Dov Kulka argues that contemporary town documents reveal that ordinary Germans were sufficiently aware of Nazi intentions vis-à-vis the Jewish "aliens," and that it would be false to assert that Germans were not responsible for what happened to Jews because "they did not know." Kulka writes: "...the repeated call to solve the 'Jewish problem' via the total disappearance of the Jews from Germany, from Europe, or their disappearance altogether...generated a situation whereby the nonexistence of the Jews had already subconsciously become accepted as reality by the German population even before the actual implementation of the 'Final Solution.'"
2. Richard Gutteridge, "German Protestantism and the Jews in the Third Reich." *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism*, (op. cit.), p. 227.
3. Ferdinand Friedensburg, "On Nazism and the Church Struggle," *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust*, eds. Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), pp. 241–55.
4. Peter Hoffman, "Problems of Resistance in National Socialist Germany," *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust*, (op. cit.), pp. 98–9, 102–03.
5. William Sheridan Allen, "Objective and Subjective Inhibitors in the German Resistance to Hitler, *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (op. cit.), p. 123.
6. Ibid., p. 122.
7. Frederick O. Bonkovsky, "The German State and the Protestant Elite," *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (op. cit.), pp. 124–47.
8. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 31; and Rudolph Lill's article, "German Catholicism's Attitude towards the Jews in the Weimar Republic," *Judaism and Christianity* (op. cit.), p. 151–68.
9. Yisrael Gutman, "On the Character of German Anti-Semitism," *Anti-semitism through the Ages*, Shmuel Almog, ed. (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), p. 356.
10. Klaus Scholder, "Judaism and Christianity in the Ideology of National Socialism," *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (op. cit.), pp. 183–89.

11. Richard Gutteridge, "German Protestantism and the Jews in the Third Reich." *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism* (op. cit.), p. 228; Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (op. cit.), p. 32. On Christian indifference to Nazi actions against Jews, see also J.S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecutions of the Churches 1933-1915* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 254–66.
12. Richard Gutteridge, "German Protestantism" (op. cit.), pp. 228–29.
13. For an account of the courageous position taken by Archbishop Clement August von Galen against the Nazi euthanasia program, see Gordon C. Zahn, *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Dutton Paperback, 1969), pp. 83–100.
14. Greek Patriarch cited in Saul Friedlander, *Pius XII and the Third Reich* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966), p. 144.
15. Richard Gutteridge, "German Protestantism" (op. cit.), p. 227.
16. Ibid., p. 228.
17. Ibid., p. 229.
18. Ibid., pp. 230–31.
19. Ibid., p. 231.
20. Ibid., p. 232. The effort to establish an Aryan Christianity, including an Aryanized Jesus, is also fully examined in J.S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecutions* (op.cit.), pp. 168–201.
21. Richard Gutteridge, "German Protestantism" (op. cit.), p. 232.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., p. 245.
24. Ibid., p. 246.
25. Ibid., pp. 243–44. To the list of courageous Protestants who took a stand against the Nazi regime, one must add the name of Kurt Gerstein, a convinced Christian, who deliberately became an SS officer in order to bear witness to the evil committed by the SS. See the extraordinary book by Saul Friedlander, *Kurt Gerstein: The Ambiguity of Good* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), which discusses Gerstein's life and motivation.
26. Uriel Tal, "Aspects of Politics in the Nazi Era," *Judaism and Christianity Under the Impact of National Socialism* (op. cit.), pp. 63–95. See also, Uriel Tal, "On the Status of German Jewry at the Outset of the Third Reich," *Third Annual Lecture of the Jacob M. and Shoshana Schreiber Chair of Contemporary Jewish History* (Tel Aviv University, 1982).
27. Uriel Tal, "Aspects of Politics" (op. cit.), pp. 74–5.
28. Ibid., pp. 79–85.
29. Ibid., p. 95.
30. Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Indiana: Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 20. Phayer's

account of the behavior of German Catholics in the Nazi period should also be read alongside Guenter Lewy's *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), and Gordon C. Zahn's *German Catholics and Hitler's Wars* (New York: Dutton Paperback, 1969).

31. Ibid., pp. 21–2.
32. Ibid., p. 23.
33. Ibid., p. 45.
34. Ibid., p. 44.
35. John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Viking Press, 1999). For a strikingly different portrait of Pius XII, one that exonerates him of any guilt for his policies vis-à-vis Nazi Germany, see Rabbi David. G. Dalin, *The Myth of Hitler's Pope* (Washington DC: Henry Regnery, 2005). Dalin's book should be read alongside the study of the Jewish Italian Studies scholar David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001). Kertzer has a very different view of the popes, including Eugenio Pacelli, and their attitude towards Jews,
36. Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust 1930-1965* (op. cit.), pp. 74–5.
37. Ibid., p. 59.
38. Ibid., p. 58.
39. Ibid., p. 54–5.
40. Ibid., p. 3.
41. For a full account of the intrigues that lay behind the encyclical *Humani Generis Unitas* see, Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *The Hidden Encyclical of Pius XI*, trans. Steven Rendall, Introduction by Gary Wills (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1997).
42. That Hitler and the Nazi party leaders were not immune to international criticism is shown by the moderation of their aggressive anti-Jewish policies prior and during the 1936 Olympic Games held in Berlin, where “some Jews were even allowed to compete in the games themselves.” See Ronnie S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992), p. 131.
43. Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust* (op.cit.), pp. 48–9.
44. Ibid., p. 42.
45. Ibid., p. 65.
46. Susan Zuccotti, *Under His Very Windows* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).
47. Cited in the chronology of Pius XII, eds. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth, *Pope Pious XII and the Holocaust* (London: Leicester University Press, 2000), p. 27.

48. Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust* (op. cit.), pp. 61–66.
49. Ibid., p. 109.
50. Ibid., p. 113.
51. Ibid., pp. 111–32.
52. Georges Passelecq and Bernard Suchecky, *The Hidden Encyclical Hidden of Pius XI* (op. cit.).
53. Ibid., pp. xviii–xix. The distinction between a *justified* disapproval of Jews, as rejecting the Christian revelation, and an *unjustified* racial anti-Semitism, which contradicts the common humanity of all of God's creatures by pseudo-racial categories based on an Aryan/non-Aryan concept, the latter a view widely held in Vatican circles and extending through all past popes, including Pius XI and XII. For discussion of this distinction see David I. Kertzer, *The Popes Against the Jews* (op. cit.), 264–91.
54. Ibid., p. 240.
55. Ibid., p. 246.
56. Ibid., p. 247.





*The Question for Christians after the Holocaust:  
Was the Cross Triumphant Over Sin and Death?*

I

It is impossible for me to reflect on the event of the Holocaust without remembering centuries of Christian theological antagonism toward Judaism — that “teaching of contempt” of which the French historian Jules Isaac spoke so perceptively. The anti-Judaic polemic spewed forth by church thinkers from early New Testament times seeded the ground for the modern racial ideology we call anti-Semitism. There can be honest disagreement about whether Nazism represents a later, more destructive stage of the basic Christian polemic, or whether the Nazis were in essence idolatrous pagans who used the *adversos Judaeos* tradition to rationalize and justify the sacrifice of Jews to the gods of blood and soil. Either way, we must not fail to recognize the complicity of Christendom (doctrines, leaders and institutions) in the Holocaust. As Raul Hilberg has written,

“The missionaries of Christianity had said in effect: You have no right to live among us as Jews. The secular rulers who followed had complained: You have no right to live among us. The German Nazis at last decreed: You have no right to live. . . . The process began with the attempt to drive the Jews into Christianity. The development was continued in order to force the victims into exile. It was finished when the Jews were driven to their deaths. The German Nazis, then, did not discard the past; they built upon it. They did not begin a development; they completed it.”<sup>1</sup>

In chapters one through five I undertook to account for the dismal facts of historic Christian contempt towards Jews and Judaism. What must concern us now is not the historical fact of Christian contempt, but a decidedly more theological question: What difference does the Holocaust make, or what difference ought it make, to Christians in their fundamental beliefs about sin, about redemption, and about Jesus Christ? This

theological question is sharpened to a deadly point by the historical evolution of traditional Christian anti-Judaism into modern racial anti-Semitism, an evolution whose consequence was the Holocaust.

It could be argued that anti-Semitism attaches not to Christian faith, *per se*, but rather to a group of individuals who, lacking love and derelict in their duty *as Christians*, proved faithless to their lord Jesus Christ. This argument can be taken only so far. If Christianity possesses integrity-of-faith, an inner unity of belief and practice, then the Christian, precisely *as Christian*, is morally and intellectually obligated to answer the question, "What difference does the Holocaust make to one's faith in Jesus Christ?" In the first century, when Paul carried the message of Jesus Christ out of Jerusalem to the Gentile peoples of Asia Minor, as a Jew he was convinced of its truth. He believed that if his fellow Jews did not then accept its truth, they would eventually do so. Now, almost 2,000 years after Paul, the Christian should reflect on the truth of the gospel, not in spite of, but because of, Auschwitz.

This is easier said than done. The trouble is that, with few exceptions, the Holocaust is seen by Christians as a particularly Jewish subject, not just because so many Jews were involved in the event, but in a deeper more troubling sense: whatever questions the Holocaust raises, whatever institutions, values, beliefs are to be re-examined in its aftermath, these are matters about which only Jews should concern themselves. Given this attitude, we should recognize the ordinary, inescapable element of human indifference — we really do not weep over the suffering and death that only touches others. Such indifference also suggests the deep difficulty of Christianity to confront the worst disaster in Jewish history, indeed the worst disaster in universal human history.

What made this vividly clear to me were the remarkable exchanges that took place some thirty years ago between the Jewish theologian Richard Rubenstein, and Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton, the Christian "death of God" theologians. Hamilton and Altizer, along with Harvey Cox and Paul van Buren, captured public attention by speaking provocatively of the exhaustion of religious meaning, the end of Christendom, and the death of God. Heralding a new age of secular freedom, these theologians commanded Christians to break with the Church's repressive psychology of sin, guilt, and judgment and to create new history in a modern "religionless" world as free, secular and mature human beings. The spirit of their

injunction was nicely summed up in one of Williams Hamilton's essays, "The New Optimism — From Prufrock to Ringo:"

I have been concerned to establish a new mood of optimism in American culture. If I have seen this mood at all accurately then we might be able to conclude that tragedy is culturally impossible, or unlikely. We trust the world, we trust the future, we deem even many of our intractable problems just soluble enough to reject the tragic mode of facing them.<sup>2</sup>

This 1966 rejection of the "tragic mode" shows how quickly the new mood of optimism in American culture made us forget some older European truths about suffering, death and human destiny. By 1968, after the commitment of nearly half a million American troops in the Vietnam War, Christian theologians no longer spoke of optimism in American culture.

In contrast to his Christian colleagues, Richard Rubenstein argued that the end of religion signals not a new freedom for man, but a more frightening manifestation of perennial human despair. The "death of God" is misused as a symbol, he declared, if it expresses something other than Nietzsche's insight into the dissolution of man's cultural and spiritual life. In our era the "death of God" can only mean one thing — Auschwitz. The implication is clear, if we are to come to terms with the death of God, Christians, no less than Jews, must confront the reality of Auschwitz.

As a Jew, Rubenstein was able to offer some very provocative suggestions about what Jewish life means, or ought to mean, after Auschwitz "in a time of the death of God."<sup>3</sup> He also challenged Christians to speak for themselves. Speaking for myself as a Christian, I cannot honestly avoid this challenge, but I am much less sure what Christian faith means or ought to mean after Auschwitz, than what it ought *not* to mean.<sup>4</sup>

## II

Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Romans, writes that "God . . . shows his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us." And he concludes, "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more should we be saved from the wrath of God." (Rom. 5:8–9, RSV) Paul was one of the first followers of the Nazarene to proclaim the conquest of sin in and through Jesus Christ. Unquestionably his statement of belief was

defined subsequent Christian thinking. The Passion narratives of the Synoptic Gospels were decisively influenced by Paul's view of the Cross' victory over sin and death, and this theme of victory is raised to a majestic level in the prologue to the Gospel of John where Jesus Christ is equated with the Word of God.

When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him. All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the life of man. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it. (Gospel of John 1:1–5, RSV)

The Christian's belief that God was in Christ means that the world's sinful downfall was overcome even before the world began, "The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never quenched it." The triumph of the cross over sin and death is sealed by the evidence of the empty tomb, faith's expression of God's miraculous resurrection of the crucified Jesus. For this reason the Gospel narratives became *evangelion*, the "good news."

However differently the various theological traditions of the church have interpreted the victory of the cross, it is this message of accomplished redemption that gives the essential and abiding form to Christian faith. And with that message we Christian theologians are confronted with an extraordinarily painful question "How could sin appear in the world after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?" Why human history, as we have known it? And, how should we bring the sin, suffering and evil of the past 2,000 years in line with our theological commitment to the victorious cross? Before searching for our own answers to these terrifying questions, consider how some great modern Christian thinkers of the past struggled to provide their own answers.

Consider the argument of Henry Nelson Wieman, the distinguished American philosopher of religion, who taught for many years at the University of Chicago Divinity School. Wieman sought to reconcile his own keen sense of the brutality of history with the message of accomplished redemption. He discovered what he believed to be an appropriate analogy from World War II history.<sup>5</sup> He argued that Christ's defeat of sin was like the

Russians' defeat of the Germans at Stalingrad: there would be more fighting, but the decisive battle had been won, the tide of history had turned. Would that it were true! It would be good to believe that history is a great war where Christ can and did win the decisive battle over sin. But if history shows anything, it shows that Christ did not win but rather lost the decisive battle, not once, but over and over again. Karl Löwith, the German existentialist philosopher, in his brilliant study, *Meaning in History*, makes the point in detail:

As a history of the world, the empirical history after Christ is qualitatively not different from the history before Christ if judged from either a strictly empirical or a strictly Christian viewpoint. History is, through all the ages, a story of action and suffering, of power and pride, of sin and death. In its profane appearance it is a continuous repetition of painful miscarriages and costly achievement which end in ordinary failure — from Hannibal to Napoleon and the contemporary leaders.

And he adds,

There never has been and never will be an immanent solution of the problem of history, for man's historical experience is one of steady failure. Christianity, too, as a historical *world* religion, is a complete failure. The world is still as it was in the time of Alaric; only our means of oppression and destruction (as well as of reconstruction) are considerably improved and are adorned with hypocrisy.<sup>6</sup>

But if the coming of Christ and the work of the church have not materially reduced the world's sinfulness, what can we make of Paul's faith in Christ's victory over sin? Löwith senses the problem. Like Wieman, Löwith, wants to interpret the appearance of Jesus Christ as an actual revelation of grace which historically anticipates the complete redemption of man, awaited in the End-Time. The relationship between the good, which Christ brings, and the failure to defeat the powers of evil, is regarded as paradoxical, ambiguous, a spiritual-cosmic struggle of visible and invisible. Löwith writes:

Since Christ these [evil] powers are already subjected and broken, but nevertheless remain powerfully alive. Invisibly, history has

fundamentally changed; visibly, it is still the same, for the Kingdom of God is already at hand, and yet, as an *eschaton*, still to come. This ambiguity is essential to all history after Christ: the time is already fulfilled and yet not consummated.<sup>7</sup>

Löwith solves the problem presented by a Christ who came to redeem a history that remains manifestly unredeemed, by appealing to a God who, when he chooses, will replace history with the transcendent Kingdom. Thus, what begins in our author's thinking with a realistic perception of the tragedy of human history, ends with the conventional rhetoric of special Christian pleading. We should ask, "What sense does it make to speak of "[evil] powers ... subjected and broken, but still ... powerfully alive?" We should also ask, "If they *are* broken, then why are they alive? If they *are* alive, then they are *not* broken?" Löwith speaks of the "ambiguity ... essential to all history after Christ." And, we should ask, "Is the ambiguity in history, or is it in the struggles of Christian theology to find meaning in the wretchedness of human history?" Meaning, that is, in relation to belief in the victory of Jesus Christ over sin and death.

The conclusion we must reach is that Christian belief in the victory of Christ's cross is *a priori* truth, a formal not an empirical truth, a truth established independently of history, faithfully adhered to as *true belief*, apart from the factual evidence of history. Holding to such *true belief* leads Christians to a homogenized picture of sin, a certain flattening-out of the experience of guilt. When it is claimed that Christ died for all human beings, whatever their sins and however great or small, then little attention is paid to sins themselves; no degree is allowed in human culpability, no perception is permitted of the magnitude of guilt. How very different the medieval symbol of purgatory, which was an insightful, if vengeful, acknowledgement of the differences in wickedness. Martin Luther and the Reformers would allow for no degree of sinfulness. Led by Paul's words, "All have sinned and fallen short of the law," they did away with these differences. The liberalization and secularization of modern western culture completed the process begun in the sixteenth century, by not only doing away with the differences among sins, but by doing away with sin itself.

It is this homogenization of sin, in my judgment, stemming as it does from the gospel of the victorious cross, that often leads Christian theologians to utter the words Auschwitz and Hiroshima in one breath. I believe

there is an authentic way to associate the two events, to compare the way in which each is an expression of the modern tendency to commit what Albert Camus called “administrative murder,” wherein human beings are regarded as objects to be cleanly and neatly disposed of by way of “a few freight trains, a few engineers, a few chemists.” (André Schwarz-Bart) But, there is also an inauthentic linking of Auschwitz and Hiroshima, suggesting that one crime is not worse than the other. When this assumption is made, consciously or unconsciously, the Christian theologian is off the hook. If he or she is persuaded to believe that Auschwitz is no worse than Hiroshima, one can treat the destruction of six million Jews and one million Gypsies as another instance of universal evil. In this way one doesn’t have to treat Auschwitz in its particularity. One doesn’t have to look at it right there where all the terror, all the truth lies.

### III

Jacques Maritain, the great French Roman Catholic philosopher, was an exception to the prevailing pattern of Christian indifference to the Holocaust. In 1938, shortly before the Second World War, he authored an essay detailing the rise of anti-Semitic actions from one European country to another; it is a remarkable statement containing a presentiment of the extermination of Europe’s Jews. Discussing the savagery loosed on German Jewry by the Nazis in reprisal for the assassination of one of their diplomats by a Jew, Maritain concludes with this observation:

... when we learned these things, we thought that truly armed men can do precisely what they will with unarmed men, we thought that we must thank the National-Socialists for not having decreed that all Jews today — and tomorrow, all Christians who prefer to obey God rather than men — be simply reduced to ashes by the most scientific means; for in the world today who can stop them?<sup>8</sup>

The full truth of the expression *reduced to ashes by scientific means* unfolded like a shroud in the next several years, a truth not wasted on Maritain. If the facts of the Holocaust did little to shake his belief in the victorious cross, they did seem to expose him to uncertainties about the relationship between suffering and salvation. In order to appreciate the change, one

must note Maritain's attitude toward Judaism and compare it with what he said later.

In an essay of 1937, "The Mystery of Israel," Maritain refers to "the basic weakness of the mystical communion of Israel," which is "its failure to understand the cross, its refusal of the cross." He also speaks of the passion of historical suffering of the Jewish people:

It is the passion of a scapegoat, enmeshed in the earthly destiny of the world and in the ways of the world mixed with sin, a scapegoat against which the impure suffering of the world strike back, when the world seeks vengeance for the misfortunes of its history upon what activates that history. Israel thus suffers the repercussions of the activation it produces, or which the world feels it is destined to produce....<sup>9</sup>

When one looks beneath the involutions of his writing, one recognizes that the author repeats the argument of the ancient church fathers: the Jewish people, in rejecting Christ, antagonize the Christian world, thereby bringing calamity down on itself. The clear implication is that if the Jewish people accept the message of the New Testament, if Israel ceases to be Israel, anti-Semitism will stop, Jewish suffering will cease.

It is impossible to know if the events of World War II and the Holocaust made Maritain recognize in the 2,000 year old church/synagogue antagonism the role of Christian triumphalism in turning the Jewish refusal of Christ against Jews themselves, thus preparing the way for modern racial anti-Semitism. After the war, however, Maritain seems somehow more realistic in his attitude toward Jewish suffering. We no longer hear that Jews, by holding to their beliefs, cause their own suffering. There is the hint that a suffering so abysmal cannot be evaded by any thinker who truly believes, as Maritain believes, that the ways of God are intelligible and justifiable to man.

In an essay of 1946, which takes its title from Jesus' Eighth Beatitude, "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," Maritain speaks of the classical Christian equation between suffering and salvation. There are the venerable saints of the church who chose suffering in imitation of Christ's cross, sharing his victory over death, inheriting the kingdom of heaven. But, what of those who are not saints, those who do not belong to the church and, indeed, those who were



not even permitted a choice? Maritain faces the questions honestly. After reciting instances of Nazi atrocities, including facts of the destruction of Jews, he asks,

Where lay the consolation of these persecuted innocents? And how many others died completely forsaken. They did not give their lives, their lives were taken from them, and under the shadow of horror. They suffered without having wanted to suffer. They did not know why they died. Those who know why they died are greatly privileged people.<sup>10</sup>

What is significant in Maritain's statement is its spirit: it reveals that rare instance in which a Christian thinker perceived, if but for a moment, that a suffering so lacking in purpose, so manifestly useless, ruins the order of reason and calls into question the efficacy of the grace and judgment through which Christians believe that God rules the creation. But, in the quoted words, Maritain seems to recognize what every human being (in my opinion) should recognize — that in relation to such suffering the words *tragedy*, *sacrifice*, *martyrdom* lose their meaning and become hollow. After all, could there really be an eternal divine truth on which the Holocaust victims martyred themselves? I think we should say that it is indecent even to search for such a truth. Certainly not a Christian truth; nor in any truth contained in the Jewish tradition of *Kiddush ha Shem*. Religious martyrdom, Christian or Jewish, loses its meaning when it is attached to the victims of the Holocaust.

It seems now that our author Jacques Maritain no longer speaks of Jews as history's scapegoat. Rather, Jews have joined countless Christians through the ages to form a fellowship of suffering. He writes: "Like strange companions they have together journeyed along the road to Calvary." And he continues, "The great mysterious fact is that the suffering of Israel have more and more distinctly taken the shape of the cross." The point is no longer Jewish suffering caused by the rejection of Christ, but, rather, Jews in their suffering share Christ's cross. Those who suffer and die without consolation are one with Christ precisely at the point of Christ's own dereliction, his own despairing agony on the cross. Maritain, however, wants to go further in assimilating Jewish suffering to the Christian teaching of the cross. In concluding that those who are one with Christ on the cross are also with him in the grace that rises victorious from the cross, he turns

away from the awful questions of history in order to find repose in the certainties of faith: "It's in the invisible world, beyond everything earthly, that the kingdom of God is given to these persecuted ones, and that everything becomes theirs."<sup>11</sup>

Jacques Maritain, the author who began with a real sense of the uselessness of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, now fails to grasp the same quality of useless destruction in Jesus' own death. In my judgment, history shows that the world made no moral or spiritual advance by the destruction of six million Jews in the twentieth century. History also shows that nothing good, nothing redemptive, came from the destruction of one Jewish man named Jesus in the first century. New life cannot be made to come out of death. But this is not seen by Maritain because, in his theology, human suffering and death are swallowed up in divine glory. Heaven justifies earthly affliction — for Jesus no less than for Jews. In a curiously unconscious way Maritain sustains the tradition of Christian triumphalism. Jewish suffering is not to be seen in its own right; instead, Jews, grafted onto the cross, become honorary Christian sufferers, sharing thereby the glory that rises from the cross. Here, surely, there is a monstrous problem. The New Testament teaches that Christ arose from the tomb to join his Father in heaven; however, we know of no other Jews who with their families left the death chambers to return to their old neighborhoods in Europe. If the suffering of Jesus is likened to the suffering of Jews, then the story of the cross should end not in heaven but on earth, not with resurrection but with death, not in glory but in defeat. If the Holocaust has a truth to teach, is this not the truth it teaches Christian theology?

#### IV

There is a scene in Elie Wiesel's *Night* in which I perceive a powerful and moving image of the truth of the crucifixion of Jews, and of Jesus:

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more disturbed than usual. To hang a boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lividly pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The gallows threw its shadow over him...

The three victims mounted together on the chairs.

The three necks were placed at the same moment within the nooses.

“Long live liberty!” cried the two adults.

But the child was silent.

“Where is God? Where is He?” someone behind me asked.

At a sign from the head of the camp, the three chairs tipped over.

Total silence throughout the camp. On the horizon, the sun was setting.

“Bare your heads!” yelled the head of the camp. His voice was raucous. We were weeping.

“Cover your heads!”

Then the march past began. The two adults were no longer. Their tongues hung swollen, blue tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive...

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

“Where is God Now?”

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

“Where is He? Here He is — He is hanging here on this gallows...”<sup>12</sup>

I do not know if Elie Wiesel consciously employed images from the story of Christ’s crucifixion to tell his own story. Perhaps it doesn’t matter. The same elements are there: three Jews, each accused of crimes, one a youth and the symbol of innocence, all forsaken by God. I am told that some Christian theologians interpret this story as a Jewish vindication of the Christian belief in salvation through Christ’s cross; it strikes me as a parody of the Christian teaching of the Cross. Christians do not teach the cross without also teaching the empty tomb. The Christian story of the cross ends not in defeat, but in victory, in resurrection. But there is no empty tomb in Wiesel’s story, no resurrection; the story of this cross ends not in new life, but with more death.

We Christians are exhorted to fashion our faith after Paul's words to the Christian converts of Corinth: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." (1 Cor. 15:17, RSV) But what should the Christian believe about Christ when in the twentieth century millions of Jews are put to death and not one rises again? There is an elementary question of justice here. The real problem with the Christian teaching of the resurrection is not scientific, "Can it, did it happen?", but rather moral, "What difference has it made?" Indeed if we turn St. Paul's statement around and begin with the ineffectuality of Christian faith through history, we must conclude that man is still very much in sin and Christ did not defeat death. I myself cannot read Wiesel's memoir, *Night*, without feeling that the time has long since passed when one could accept the cross as the symbol of healing through sacrifice, of restoring the order of things by the shedding of innocent blood. After Auschwitz the meaning of sacrificial atonement for this one Christian has lost its credibility. I recognize that the experience of suffering can reveal a truth which is otherwise hidden. But when suffering, as in the destruction of European Jewry, vastly exceeds the human limit, then darkness replaces light and truth is swallowed up by emptiness.

What Wiesel's story teaches me is that if God and man wait to be reconciled and the world made whole by the blood of a young innocent Jew in the twentieth century, as in the first century, perhaps salvation isn't worth the cost. Dostoevsky understood this when in *The Brothers Karamazov* he had Ivan say to his younger brother Alyosha, "I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of ... one tortured child..."<sup>13</sup>

## V

If Wiesel's story is a parody of the Christian theology of the victorious cross, it is also a penetrating insight into the perennial truth of the cross. For each day of the earth's history, countless, unnamed human beings suffer their crosses unwillingly and die without hope. The Gospel writers wrote of the empty tomb because they sincerely believed that Jesus was the Messiah who, upon his death, rose to heaven to sit on the right hand of the Father. But in telling their story they did not overlook the deepest, most human episodes in Christ's Passion. There is the scene in Gethsemane where, as the hour of tribulation approaches, Jesus' faith is for the first time crossed

with desperation, and he implores the Lord, "Abba, Father ... all things are possible to thee; take this cup away from me...." (Mark 14:36 RSV) Here is a powerful symbol of the common truth that no human being chooses his cross gladly, but rather suffers it in humiliation and defeat. The writers knew that every cross is suffered alone. Peter, who was closest to Jesus, denies his master three times, and all the disciples flee the scene of the arrest in mortal fear of their own lives. Finally, into the mouth of Jesus on the cross are put the words of universal human dereliction taken from the twenty-second Psalm, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

No Christian artist expressed this truth of dereliction more powerfully than Matthias Gruenewald, the sixteenth century German painter, in his "Colmar" (*Isenheim*, 1513–1515) and "Karlsruhe" (1526) depictions of the Crucifixion. The ashen, bruised, dislocated bones, the open mouth of pain, the elongated, skeletal fingers supplicating the silent heaven make us see a pitiful, broken man alone on the cross, subjected to final punishment. It is a true picture of innocent, unredeemed suffering. Emil Fackenheim has reminded us that it was precisely the true picture of Jesus' torment that aroused Christian animosity against Jews as Christ-killers, not the idealized pictures of the cross, where the body of Christ is transfigured, glorified in the imagery of the resurrection.<sup>14</sup> To appreciate Fackenheim's point within the tradition of Crucifixion art one has only to compare the terrifying Gruenewald pictures with Salvador Dali's "Christ of St. John of the Cross" (1950), a masterpiece in its style, where the Christian belief in the victory of the cross is fueled by the sight of Christ's body, full and sensuous, luminous with promise of new life, a body fixed on a cross which towers majestically over the world.

The terrible paradox in Jewish/Christian relations throughout history is that often the false, not the true story of the cross had to be told to safeguard the Jew from the contempt of the Christian. The true story is that of human dereliction. The same common/human cry of dereliction is expressed in Wiesel's story of the hanged boy who symbolizes each of the Holocaust victims. Thus, Wiesel expresses a truth of the New Testament seldom seen by us (Christian readers): the Jew who died on a cross in Roman Palestine portended the fate of Jews and countless other human beings in the succeeding centuries. Paul employed the language of Temple sacrifice when he stated his belief in the redemption Jesus had wrought through the shedding of his blood — "Christ Jesus whom God put forward

as an expiation by his blood to be received by faith.” (Rom. 3:25, RSV) But if, as Wiesel’s story suggests, the sacrifice was in vain, if Christ’s blood produces not new human life but more Jewish blood, has any redemption taken place? And, if no redemption, no reconciliation between God and man has occurred, what price in truth does the Christian pay to sustain some of our cherished teachings of belief? These are questions of belief we, as Christians, are bidden to ponder in our practical day-to-day religious faith — for ourselves and for our different churches — in this day whose light is shed by the fire of the Holocaust.

Notes

1. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-45* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), pp. 3-4.
2. William Hamilton, "The New Optimism - From Prufrock to Ringo," in *Radical Theology and the Death of God*, Thomas J.J. Altizer and William Hamilton (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 168.
3. Richard L. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).
4. My own previous efforts to provide a measure of theological reflection on the Holocaust are contained in the following. "The Holocaust in the Stories of Elie Wiesel", *Sounding* 55 (1972), pp. 200-15; "Art and the Inhuman: A Reflection on the Holocaust," *The Christian Century* 91 (1974), pp. 953-57; "The Mystery of Suffering in the Art of Dostoevsky, Camus, Wiesel and Gruenewald," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (1975), pp. 51-61. Also see "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic? A Review Essay of Rosemary Ruether and Roy Bowen Ward, *Faith and Fratricide*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 45/2 (1977), pp. 193-214.
5. Henry Nelson Wieman, *The Source of Human Good* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1946).
6. Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 190, 191.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 188.
8. Jacques Maritain, *A Christian Looks at the Jewish Question* (New York: Harper & Row, 1939), p. 87.
9. Jacques Maritain, "The Mystery Of Israel," in *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, eds. Joseph Evans and Leo Ward, (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1965), p. 203.
10. Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1952), pp. 224-25.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
12. Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York: Avon Books, 1971), 75-6.
13. For an expression of this point see my article, "Dostoevsky's Criminal Heroes: The Ethics of Russian Atheism," *Cross Currents* XXV (1975), pp. 131-48.
14. Fackenheim's comments were made in an academic conference on the writings of Elie Wiesel, Long Island, New York (1978).





## *Betrayal of Spirit*

### I

Can there be a *conclusion* to a book whose contents are about contempt, hatred, and genocide when those on-going realities are seemingly fixed in human nature and history?

The decision to conclude this book without an Epilogue, an Afterword, or some other formalized Conclusion raises an important question: In the future should one expect another mass destruction of the Jewish people, a second Holocaust? I asked this question of Elie Wiesel in his visit to lecture at my school, Miami University (Ohio), in 1978. His answer then (I was relieved to hear) was negative. I don't remember every word of his explanation, but I do recall that he referred to the gap between intention and execution. His thoughts, paraphrased here, were that perhaps some time, somewhere in the future, once again somebody might have the intention of eradicating the whole Jewish people, but the power of execution would be lacking — never again would another nation muster the sheer logistics of the Nazi Final Solution.

Wiesel's words may provide real, if only small, comfort to those Israelis who remember the Arab cry of "throw the Jews into the sea," a cry uttered by Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1967 on the eve of the Six Days War. It was a sentiment repeated more recently in 2006 by Iran's Prime Minister Mahmoud Ahmadinejad when he called for the extinction of Israel. The same Iranian prime minister, in December 2006, sponsored an international conference in Teheran to challenge the very fact that a Holocaust was committed against the Jewish people. According to a report from the *The Economist*, most speakers at the conference challenged the accepted facts of the Holocaust, or accused Jews of skewing the facts to help justify the establishment of the Jewish state. Afterwards, participants were invited to meet President Ahmadinejad, who had called for the event following his assertion the previous year that the Holocaust was a myth. *The Economist* went on to report that on the second day of the conference

“President Ahmadinejad declared that ‘Israel is about to crash. The Soviet Union disappeared, and this will be the fate of the Zionist regime ... Humanity will be free.’”<sup>1</sup>

Genocide, of course, did not begin with the Jewish people, nor will it end with them. If it is true that history never repeats itself, then what this means is that genocide will record its own new history if not with Jews in the twentieth century, then with Africans, Asians, Muslims and non-Muslims, and others in the twenty-first century, as it is presently doing.<sup>2</sup>

If one does not expect a second Jewish Holocaust, then the issue of Jew-hatred is hardly set aside in the twenty-first century, especially when we see it spreading throughout Muslim countries. Today incidents of anti-Semitism multiply, and political and religious leaders in Muslim countries seem determined to exploit the multi-faceted tragedy of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute to weaken the Jewish state. This is done through perpetuating mediaeval and modern anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jew as world-deceiver and power-conspirator. This is what seems to have been done in the Iranian conference to which we’ve just referred.<sup>3</sup>

## II

This brings me to my colleague Professor Ellen Fine of CUNY at Queens. Professor Fine invited me some years ago to contribute an essay to a symposium volume on the study of the Holocaust, which was to address the theme, “Facing the Horror; Finding a New Voice: Reconstruction.” I readily accepted the invitation because it gave me an opportunity to say what I believe to be both right and wrong in our thinking about the event of the Holocaust. This particular essay also gave me the opportunity to reflect on how the issue of Jew-hatred has on-going implications that extend beyond the history of Christian anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust. I trust that the reader will agree with me that is a suitable final chapter to a book whose general theme is betrayal of spirit — betrayal which runs through anti-Judaism, through anti-Semitism, through the Holocaust — which may now extend beyond Christian behavior into the world of Muslim-Jewish relations.<sup>4</sup>

The word “Reconstruction” in Professor Fine’s conference symposium theme, means to build anew, to make over. Normally we reconstruct when we *rebuild*, or return to preexisting status what fell into disrepair and/or

came to ruin. In this case we search for the foundation to build a new structure where the old one once stood. Can we, indeed *ought* we, to speak so of the Holocaust? Did the Holocaust leave a foundation? Was there anything left standing? To propose “reconstruction” on the lives of survivors or even on their memories is unthinkable.

My study convinces me that there was nothing in the Second World War more successful than Hitler’s “War against the Jews.” One should not need reminders of this, but there are reminders. There is a room of scaled wooden models of noted European synagogues in the new Diaspora Museum on the campus of Tel Aviv University. With monotonous regularity, one notices on the description card after each model the same statement in parenthesis: “Destroyed in the Holocaust.” These words prompt me to say that where devastation is unique, complete, irreversible, reducing people and culture to nothing, we find a peculiarly perverse application of the medieval principle, *ex nihilo nihil fit*, “from nothing comes nothing.”

A correct understanding of the Holocaust, as irreparable catastrophe, forces study, teaching, and writing of the event to proceed under two constraints. The first is intellectual. The western rationalist tradition holds that the pursuit of knowledge is the sure road to understanding. But there is also a skeptical tradition in our intellectual history which cautions that no act of reasoning or fact-gathering can ever fully or accurately grasp things in their particularity. Both traditions should be kept in mind as we approach the constellation of events we now call the Holocaust.

I recall the flat assertion of Elie Wiesel, “the Holocaust teaches nothing,” which I interpret to mean that after we have carefully considered the different explanations, we should not be surprised if there lingers in our minds an awful sense of the abysmal, impenetrable mystery in the whole thing. For is it not true that great evil, no less than great goodness, exposes the limits of our human understanding?<sup>5</sup>

The second constraint in approaching the Holocaust is moral. In earlier writing, I’ve referred to pure and impure ways to read about the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup> We may resist the temptation to reduce our thinking to self-defeating moralization, rendering the event a convenient vehicle of blame and praise. The historian Henry Friedlander voices a similar caution when he asserts. “You cannot teach [the Holocaust] as a moral lesson ... so particular that no one else can use it.”<sup>7</sup> I agree with Friedlander. Moralization often occurs with the refusal to treat an event as other than particular. There is some question

whether the particular can be known, much less morally judged, in its own terms. The scientific study of the past respects the particular *as particular*, but scientific study is an instrument, a means of historical thinking, not its end. The goal of historical reflection is the discernment of a bridge between past and present, making it possible for human beings to face their future with less fear, more courage. The past does not study itself and the dead tell no tales. It is we the living who write books, the questions we put to the past are our questions, and we shape words in the hope that the past in all its tragic mystery can illumine our lives here and now ... as we anticipate the future.

### III

There is no better reason to study the Holocaust than to face the horror that we may find a new voice. But what is it to “face the horror?” The horror of the Holocaust is quite commonly associated with the gruesome details. However long we stare unflinchingly at concentration camp scenes we may fail to perceive an altogether different horror, which I believe is at the root of everything shown in book and film. The less visible but no less real horror of the Holocaust has to do with the changed quality of evil, with an evil that has become routine, mundane or abstract. It is the great accomplishment of Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963) to have shown how this was so.<sup>8</sup>

Arendt’s judgment of the actions of Adolph Eichmann — and of all those above and below him in the Nazi chain of command — as a “banality of evil” was denounced by both Jewish and non-Jewish critics as a trivialization of a monstrous crime. The critics failed to see that the author had chosen this phrase precisely in order to convey the unique, unprecedented character of the crime and of the criminals responsible for it. It was Arendt’s thesis that the Final Solution succeeded as well as it did because the Nazi leadership, from Hitler down, was able to take the anti-Semitism that formed so vital a part of the Nazi ideology and translate it into bureaucratic terms. Thus, the key to approaching an understanding of the Holocaust is not anti-Semitic hostility toward Jews, *per se*, but the translation of this hostility into political, legal and administrative acts. The methodical, systematic reduction of the rights of Jews in the area of German domination, eliminating their status as human beings, ensured the success

of the Final Solution. The road that ended with the gassing factory had its beginning with the yellow star and the decrees rendering the Jew stateless. These early measures of the National Socialist government put Jews beyond the protection and help of any state, leaving them at the mercy of the Nazi administrators for the Final Solution. We know that in the very few western European countries (Denmark and Bulgaria) where Nazis could not effectively enforce the Yellow star and where Jews could not be treated as stateless, the Nazis proved much less successful in shipping Jews to the extermination centers of Poland.

Nothing in Arendt's study so vividly reveals the distinctly *abstract* evil of the Holocaust than the Language Rule (*Sprachregelung*) the Nazis employed to camouflage the gravity of their deeds, and to facilitate the co-operation of vast numbers of Germans who might otherwise balk at such extreme action. Thus extermination or mass killing was referred to only by the code names "Final Solution," "Evacuation," "Special Treatment."

Yellow stars, statelessness, language rules and, finally, extermination by gassing, which the Nazis regarded as a humane way of solving the Jewish problem. All these are part of what I have referred to as the "abstractness" of evil, wherein a certain psychic distance makes it possible for the killer to avoid his victims and thus to kill them with greater efficiency, in vast numbers.<sup>10</sup>

Beneath the gruesome details, this is the essential horror of the Holocaust we must face. And, if we do face it, we cannot help but recognize, as the closing pages of Arendt's book state, that the administrative murder applied to Jews several decades back can be and most likely will be applied to other "surplus populations" in the decades to come.<sup>11</sup> In this regard it is instructive to read Richard Rubenstein's brief study, *The Cunning of History: Mass Death and the American Future* (1975), which seeks to extend Arendt's thesis to the political and social situations of non-Jewish peoples.<sup>12</sup>

#### IV

What is it to "find a new voice," in relation to the Holocaust? This event was so massive in evil, tragedy and suffering that one's voice is silenced. Certainly our voices should be silenced with respect to traditional ways of thinking about the God-human relationship. Since the Holocaust, anyone who wishes to reflect sensitively and maturely on basic Jewish and

Christian and Islamic teachings about providence, election, covenant and redemption, must struggle to find some way to speak of these cardinal theological doctrines in full view of the Holocaust.

There is another scriptural teaching no less basic, that of the Holy Spirit, the creative energy of God, a teaching seldom commented on in relation to the Holocaust.<sup>13</sup> The scriptural witnesses to God common to Jews, Christians, and Muslims speak of God creating man “in his own image.” (Gen. 1:27; RSV) Another witness speaks of God who “breathed into His [man’s] nostrils the breath of life.” (Gen. 2:7; RSV) In the Koran it is written, “I have breathed my spirit into Adam.” (XV, 29) Thereby it is understood, says commentator Seyyed Hossein Nasr, that “man will be able to acquire knowledge to see the value of righteous conduct and would refrain from being disobedient to God’s commands.”<sup>14</sup>

The point is the same in all three religions: God fashioned the human according to His own likeness. The Spirit is holy because it is the divine human link — that which sets the human apart in the creation, making him and her distinctly *human*. The Spirit unites all human beings to each other by virtue of a common origin in the creator-God. But how is Spirit exercised? How does the human express itself essentially, in a truly human manner? Our greatest thinkers, from Plato to Dewey and Whitehead, from Maimonides to al-Ghazzali and Mohammad Iqbal, provided different answers for the divinely-based humanizing faculty. Some of the different answers were reason, or faith, or freedom, or creativity, or conscience, or personality. What these answers have in common is the shared recognition that despite the physical and social forces to which human existence is subject, the human being can nevertheless experience and express qualitative (or spiritual) meaning. Therefore, the human need not submit to and remain at the level of materialistic and mechanical existence. This means that however tragic human beings find their lives on earth, their inherent power to give voice to tragedy in moral perception, in religious ritual, in artistic creation — in that very power they transcend their circumstances, give evidence of spirit, affirm their distinct humanity, and prove faithfulness to the God in whose likeness they were created.

This last point is powerfully reinforced by what the Muslim philosopher Mohammad Iqbal wrote in his book, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934). “No doubt, the emergence of [human] egos endowed with the power of spontaneous

and unforeseeable action is, in a sense, a limitation on the freedom of the all-inclusive [divine] Ego. But this limitation is not externally imposed. It is born out of His own creative freedom whereby He has chosen finite egos to be participators of His life, power and freedom.”<sup>15</sup>

The Spirit can also be betrayed. This happens whenever — out of stupidity, or apathy, or fear — the fundamental faculties of reason, will, and the imagination are turned against themselves so that the human proves an enemy to its own kind, defaming its creator. At its deepest, this is the theological truth taught by the Holocaust. This is a truth about the betrayal of spirit that comes through the words of Raul Hilberg in connection with his research on the German railroads.

The Holocaust was not the product of a single will, not the work of a single monolithic organization. Nothing is so astonishing about this event as the fact that in its component parts it was ordinary as could be. It is only the configuration that stands unprecedented in history.

The participants in the destruction process were lawyers, accountants, physicians, engineers, diplomats, bankers, clerks. They ran the gamut of modern, organized, specialized society. In my research over nearly 30 years, I have met them through their documents. But there has been a precarious lack of documentation about an integral part of the destructive machine, the German railroads...

One does not think of the word Nazi when talking about railroads, it is a service organization. Yet this organization, so set apart, so corporate in structure, was the very heart of the destruction process. The Jewish people were transported from their homes to a killing center. How did the transporters cope with their task? In the most ingenious way — by not varying their routine, by not restructuring their organization, by not changing a thing. The documents which dispatched the special trains to their destinations were not even stamped secret, because such a stamp would in itself be a recognition that the task was not ordinary. For example, the SS, particularly the Reich security main office, had to order the trains and pay for their passengers, so much per track kilometer, children under ten at half fare, children under four went free, one way — to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Bergen-Belsen. The SS chafed under the cost and elaborate organization which had to be set up to fund these transports.

Jewish community funds were siphoned off, deposited into special bank accounts and used by the SS to make the payments. Finally, the railroads said all right, if you will send a minimum of 400 people, we will charge you half price fare. It was the railroads, not the camps, that did the body counts to calculate the fare!

Not one railroad worker was ever tried...The documents of the German railroads are today in private hands, not in the federal archive...But the issues are greater than the fate of any single individual — if anyone in the German Railroad is condemned, we have to begin to ask new questions about what we have so simply and inaccurately called a monolithic totalitarian dictatorship...<sup>16</sup>

## V

Hilberg's statement ought to convince us that the Holocaust cannot be explained by reference to demented or sadistic "devils." Saul Friedlander argues that the Nazis "pathological" anti-Semitism is a primary factor in the Holocaust. True enough. But another truth is that the Holocaust did not occur, and certainly could not have occurred, without the cooperation of hundreds, perhaps thousands of normal, ordinary people of whom Hilberg speaks. Even the Holocaust executives were normal, depressingly normal, whose hostility toward Jews shows little of the pathology associated with Jew-baiting hatred. The pornographically-minded Julius Streicher was the rare exception. Most were like Adolph Eichmann. Eichmann was examined in Jerusalem by a battery of psychiatrists who certified him as normal — "more normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him," one is reported to have exclaimed. These facts raise a huge question: When it is the normal, ordinary, the otherwise decent, and not the mad and perverted that causes the greatest crimes, have we not reached the stage of the Spirit's betrayal?<sup>17</sup>

Arendt observes that "evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which we most recognize it — the quality to temptation."<sup>18</sup> Elie Wiesel says simply that "guilt was not invented at Auschwitz, it was disfigured there."<sup>19</sup> The loss of temptation and guilt are evidence of the Spirit's betrayal. When the fundamental qualities lifting humans above the level of matter are obliterated, is not the divine-human link broken? And, when the link is broken humans have become inhuman, reducing themselves to the



level of technical functions and inert objects. Eric Kahler, the literary critic, says something of the same: "The most frightening aspect of our present world is not the horrors in themselves, the atrocities, the technological exterminations, but the one fact at the very root of it all: the fading away of any human criterion...."<sup>20</sup>

It is just here that I see the relevance of Holocaust literature which, precisely *as literature*, seeks to restore the human criterion, revive the spirit, redeem it, so that we can face the horror and not turn away from it in disgust. I give but one example. Consider these unforgettable lines from Wiesel's *Night*, which deals with the burning of children at Auschwitz.

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.

Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God himself. Never.<sup>21</sup>

George Steiner, the critic, claims that "the world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason."<sup>22</sup> I could not agree more. One cannot speak of the unspeakable. But, is it not the special vocation of the poet to invent a voice for that which we thought had no voice? It is the voice of the poet speaking through the lines cited above. The poet does not *transmit* the horror; he *transmutes* it. Through the wielding of technique and style, through all the powers of craft, he invents a kind of voice for that which is otherwise unspeakable. We who attend to what the poet says, we who hear the voice, are made to face the horror, not turn away from it in disgust, and thereby, amidst a vast and frightening emptiness, to perceive the spiritual depths of evil, suffering and tragedy. In that perception we work to restore our link to God, the divine/human Spirit.

## Notes

1. *The Economist*, December 16-22nd, 2006, p. 45.
2. See studies of post-Holocaust genocides already referred to in chapter eight: *The New Killing Fields: Massacre and The Politics of Intervention*, eds. Mills, Nicolaus and Brunner, Kira, (New York: Basic Books, 2002).
3. A recently nationally televised PBS documentary, "Anti-Semitism in the 21st Century: The Resurgence" (shown Monday, January 8, 2007) depicted the efforts of Muslim media and religious leaders to counter policies of the Israeli state by staging dramatizations of meetings of elders to discuss the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, and to portray the ritualized blood-letting of a murdered Christian child with actors dressed as Orthodox Jews. These kinds of inflammatory media presentations, shown widely in the Muslim world, have worked to trigger anti-Jewish attacks that have occurred in the past twenty years throughout Europe and the Middle East. \_
4. Thomas A. Idinopulos, "Betrayal of the Spirit: Holocaust, Horror and Literature," *Centerpoint*, CUNY Graduate School, issue 13, "The Holocaust," eds., Ellen S. Fine, Jane Gerber, Lea Hamaoui, Rosette C. Lamont (Fall, 1980, vol. 4, no. 1).
5. Elie Wiesel has said "the Holocaust teaches nothing" in several places, but nowhere more powerfully and convincingly as in "A Plea for the Dead," *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Avon Bard Books, 1970) pp. 215-37.
6. Thomas A. Idinopulos, "Humanistic Education in an Inhuman Age, *Cross Currents* (Winter, 1977) pp. 407-08.
7. Henry Friedlander, "The Holocaust: Three Views," *ADL Bulletin* (November, 1977).
8. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Books, 1973). For a sharply worded critique of Arendt's analysis of Eichmann see David Caesarini's *Becoming Eichmann: Rethinking the Life, Crimes and Trial of a "Desk Muderer."* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2006). For an excellent review of Cesarani's book in relation to the controversy caused by Arendt's original study of Eichmann, see Barry Gewen's review, "The Everyman of Genocide," *New York Times Book Review*, May 24, 2006, p. 10.
9. According to a study by Jochen von Lang, *The Secretary, Martin Bormann: The Man Who Manipulated Hitler* (New York: Random House, 1979), "On Bormann's advice, Himmler's report on the 'final solution' was revised to eliminate the rude words 'liquidation' and 'final treatment' in favor of the neutral term 'processed through the camps,'" *Newsweek Book Review*, May 7, 1979.

10. In the discussion that followed the presentation of this essay at Reed College (April, 1979) Professor Gail Kelly, an anthropologist, made the excellent observation that it is precisely the "distance" between killer and victim in the Holocaust that separates this event from more familiar of human destruction as we find them in conventional warfare and in massacres as of the American Indians and the Armenians. I would add that the destruction machine of the Holocaust was wholly unique and worked as well as it did because its many operators wasted little time and energy in hostile emotion directed against the countless numbers of victims fed to the machine.
11. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann*, pp. 253–79.
12. Richard L. Rubenstein, *The Cunning of History: Mass Death and the American Future* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
13. For my efforts to provide a measure of theological reflection on the doctrine of Spirit in relation to the Holocaust see "The Holocaust in the Stories of Elie Wiesel," *Soundings* 55 (1972) pp. 200–15; "Art and the Inhuman: a Reflection on the Holocaust," *The Christian Century* 91 (1974) pp. 953–57; "The Mystery of Suffering in of the Art of Dostoevsky, Camus, Wiesel, and Gruenewald," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (1975), pp. 51–61; "Is Christology Inherently Anti-Semitic?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 45/2 (1977) pp. 193–214; "Christianity and the Holocaust," *Cross Currents* (Fall, 1978).
14. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality* (Crossroad: New York, 1991), p. 22.
15. Sir Mohammad Iqbal's words are cited from *Philosophers Speak of God*, Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reece (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1963), p. 296.
16. Raul Hilberg, "The Holocaust: Three Views," *ADL Bulletin* (November, 1977).
17. Saul Friedlander, "Some Aspects of the Holocaust," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 1 (Fall, 1976), pp. 36–59.
18. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann*, p. 25.
19. Elie Wiesel, "The Guilt We Share," *Legends of Our Time*, pp. 201–12.
20. Eric Kahler, *The Tower and the Abyss* (New York: Viking Press, 1966), cited from Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) p. 74.
21. Elie Wiesel, *Night*, translated from the French by Stella Rodway (New York: Avon books, 1970), p. 44.
22. George Steiner, *Language and Silence* (New York: Avon Books, 1966), p. 123.



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