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Christian Antisemitism and Auschwitz: Some Reflections on Responsibility

There is no question but that Auschwitz, the foremost symbol for the Holocaust, has come to be regarded as a “holy” place. Not in the popular sense of being ennobling or uplifting, but in the biblical sense of the word *kadosh*, as beyond the ordinary and fearsome, capable of evoking both shuddering and awe, in short, transcendent. Any number of survivors, most prominently Elie Wiesel, have argued that the Holocaust, the Nazis’ destruction of some six million Jews, transcends language. Words, they say, simply cannot communicate their experience; the Holocaust is utterly unique.

In this same vein, Arthur Cohen has taken Rudolph Otto’s classic description of the holy and revised the “transcending” *mysterium tremendum* to think about the Holocaust as a “subscending” *tremendum*. In doing so he attempted to convey an enormity and terror that transcends not only the adequacy of language but also the categories of ordinary historiography. For Cohen, the reality of the Holocaust exceeded its causalities. Nothing—not the French Revolution nor the unification of Germany, not the emancipation of the Jews nor the Christian teaching of contempt—none of these contributing causes can explain the singularity of a machinery conceived and constructed to destroy a whole people (Cohen, 1981, 6–7).

To speak of the Holocaust as singular or unique, to deny it any analogies, is a matter of some controversy. There are Orthodox Jewish thinkers who see the Holocaust as just another event in the long record of Jewish suffering. There are non-Jewish writers who compare it to other genocides (Armenians, Cambodians, the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis) (Roth-Barenbaum, 1989, 1–97, at 6). But authors, like Cohen, who argue for the utter uniqueness of the Holocaust do not do so on the basis of numbers. The number of non-Jewish civilians killed during the Second World War is an estimated nine million. The Nazis

murdered many more Russians than Jews. The case for singularity is made not on numbers but on the basis of Nazi ideology.

Nazi racist doctrine viewed the Slavic Poles, Czechs, Ukrainians, and Russians as *Untermenschen* (sub-humans), as members of an inferior albeit Aryan race. These Slavic peoples were to be murdered selectively, any potential leadership and culture destroyed. They would be allowed to live only in such numbers as to provide slave labor for the *Herrenvolk*. The Nazis made much of the fact that *Slaven*, the German word for Slavs, sounded considerably like *Sklaven*, the word for slaves. Needless to say, the German colonists who would inhabit the former Slavic lands as their new *Lebensraum* (living space), would not need twenty-six million Polish slaves, not to speak of the millions of other Slavic peoples in their newly conquered territories.

The Nazis applied the same racialist theory to the Romanies or Gypsies, another group of *Untermenschen*. So long as they were racially separated from Germans and not allowed to contaminate the Nordic Aryan bloodline, they could be allowed to live; only those of mixed blood, the so-called *Mischlinge*, were considered a danger to Aryan racial purity and had to die. In practice executioners of Nazi racialist policy routinely murdered all the Gypsies they could find, and a quarter million of them were machine-gunned or gassed (Roth-Berenbaum, 1989, 25–27, 57–58).

Quite different from the selective genocide of Romani and Slavic peoples, Nazi ideology required the total annihilation of the Jews. Jews were not merely an inferior race but an anti-race, the primal biological adversary of the German people. Every Jewish man, woman, and child was, in Hitler's word, a *Todfeind*, a "mortal enemy," whose mere physical presence was construed as a threat to the existence of the Aryan race. Jews were not merely subhuman but anti-human. Among the more favored metaphors the Nazis used of them were vermin and bacilli, disease-producing bacteria. This kind of de-humanization of Jews into a biological threat was a major factor in making the so-called *Endlösung* or "final solution" to the "Jewish question" conceivable of execution. Only by first being depersonalized and degraded in this way could Jews be subjected to mass "extermination."

This unprecedented Nazi death warrant for every person born a Jew is the ultimate basis for arguments that the Holocaust is utterly unique and therefore that it should not be universalized or made into a metaphor. Despite all arguments and denials of analogies, however, non-Jewish civilian victims of the Nazis continue to be described as the "other holocaust" or the "forgotten holocaust." Anti-abortionists speak of abortion as the "American holocaust." Historians of the seventeenth-century European witch-burnings write about the

“women’s holocaust,” and African Americans speak of the slave trade as their holocaust.

Without a doubt there are real differences between the Nazis’ attempt to destroy world Jewry and these historical atrocities, between the Holocaust and other genocides. But languages live their own unruly lives, beyond the reach of individuals and institutions. Despite all differences and disparities, the Holocaust has become the metaphor of choice for what Donald Dietrich aptly calls “macroevil.” The Holocaust and Auschwitz, its concrete symbol, have become archetypal metaphors for evil on a massive scale, or, as Arthur Cohen has put it, “a perfected figuration of the demonic” (Cohen, 1981, 32–33, 48).

If Cohen is correct, and I am persuaded that he is, Auschwitz has joined if not replaced Satan as the foremost symbol of the demonic. And even in the Western so-called post-Christian world, the Holocaust is in the process of replacing the cross as the preferred demonstration of our all too human tendencies to inhumanity. That fact warrants serious reflection by both Christian theologians and pastors, particularly when modern historiography raises the question of the responsibility of Christianity and the Christian churches for that massive evil.

RESPONSIBILITY AND THE CHURCH

For Jewish thinkers like Arthur Cohen, historian Yehuda Bauer, and philosopher Emil Fackenheim, the Holocaust has a uniqueness that will mark Jewish self-understanding for all time to come. Gregory Baum argues that the Holocaust will mark Christian self-understanding for all time as well. He speaks of the Church as convicted by its “silence,” with the alleged silence of Pope Pius XII serving as a metaphorical symbol of the Church’s guilt (Schüssler Fiorenza-Tracy, 1984, 34–42, at 35).

The subject, like so much else in this area, is complex and controverted. But the allegation became a popular assumption after 1962, when Rolf Hochhuth subjected Pius XII to scathing criticism in his play *The Deputy*. In response to Hochhuth’s charges, the Vatican issued a voluminous collection of documents on the role of the Holy See during the war (*Actes et documents*).

Assessing these documents, Jewish historian Michael Marrus views the policy of Pius XII as consistent with the longstanding Vatican tradition of remaining apart from power blocks (Marrus, 1987, 179–83). During the 1930s the Vatican criticized Nazi racism as contrary to Catholic doctrine. But during the war Pius refused to associate himself with Allied declarations against Nazi war crimes. Despite detailed information about the mass murder of Jews and numerous appeals that he speak out against it, the Pope refused to issue any explicit de-

nunciations. He himself gave humanitarian aid and strongly encouraged aid by his subordinates, but his public statements were limited to vague appeals against the oppression of unnamed racial and religious groups.

Amid accusations of pro-German and antisemitic pressures being put on Pius XII, Marrus reads the Vatican documents as belying anything like a guarded German sympathy or a supreme priority of opposition to the Soviet Union. Nor do they reveal a particular indifference to the fate of Jews, let alone hostility toward them. Rather, the Vatican's communications, along with other evidence, suggest a resolute commitment to its traditional policy of reserve and conciliation. The goal was to limit the global conflict where possible and above all to protect the influence and standing of the Church as an independent voice (Marrus, 1987, 181–82).

If the Vatican betrayed the ideals it had set for itself, at least this must be said for it. Neither the Vatican, nor any other church, nor the world Jewish community for that matter, was institutionally or psychologically prepared to deal with the historically unprecedented emergency that was the Holocaust. Once the machinery for the so-called "Final Solution" was put into operation, events moved so rapidly that both the entire Christian establishment and leadership of world Jewry were caught off guard (Huttenbach, 1995, 1–2).

There is a widespread sense among scholars that Pope Pius XII had an exaggerated and, in retrospect, politically naive faith in the efficacy of his mediative diplomacy. On this count if Pius XII refused to denounce atrocities against Jews, one must remember that he had earlier acted similarly with respect to the Catholic Poles. World War II was fought conventionally in the West, but it was anything but conventional in Poland. Under ordinary rules of warfare, the killing of non-combatants ends with surrender. In Poland, the killing of unarmed civilians increased with pacification. The deliberate systematic destruction of Europe's Jews did not begin until June 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Before that time, the terror was directed primarily against the Poles, above all but not exclusively against potential leaders of a resistance, including priests. Despite appeals from Polish bishops, Pius XII refused to denounce the atrocities committed by the German occupation against Polish Catholics (Bauer, 1982, 147).

The Holy See's posture of neutrality shifted during the course of the war. The Vatican became more overt in assisting Jews and more forthcoming in its diplomatic representations on their behalf. On the basis of the most recent documentation, especially regarding Pius XII's efforts on behalf of the Jews of Slovakia and Hungary, John

Pawlikowski concludes that “simplistic claims about papal silence at this time are grossly overstated.” There is no question that Pius XII and his administration undertook important initiatives on behalf of all Jews, not merely Jewish converts to Christianity (Perry-Schweitzer, 1994, 297).

Pawlikowski acknowledges, correctly I believe, that there can be a perfectly legitimate discussion about the adequacy of Pius XII’s approach, particularly about his unwillingness to criticize the Nazis by name or to single out the Jews by name as victims. But this is something altogether different from silence let alone indifference. Historians generally recognize that a ringing denunciation of the genocide would “almost certainly” have failed to move either the Nazis or the German public and would likely have made matters worse, especially for half-Jews (Marrus, 1987, 181, 183).

On the basis of the most recent documentation, Pawlikowski suggests that “we should permanently strike the word ‘silence’ from all Christian-Jewish conversations about the role of institutional Catholicism during the Holocaust” (Perry-Schweitzer, 1994, 294, 297). He cites Michael Marrus, who has argued persuasively that the question, “Why didn’t they [the pope, American Jews, et al.] do more” during the Holocaust is dangerously misleading. Lying behind the question is the axiomatic assumption that we would have done better. Marrus labels the assumption “narcissistic” (Marrus, 1987, 181, 183).

The Vatican and the Holocaust is obviously one of the questions lying behind a 1989 Vatican statement on “The Church and Racism,” issued by the Pontifical Justice and Peace Commission. There, in an historical overview of racist ideology and behavior including Nazi antisemitism, note is made of “the weaknesses and even, at times, of the complicity of certain church leaders, as well as of other members of the church” (*Origins*, 1989, 615). The Vatican statement emphasizes, however, the consistency of the magisterial doctrine condemning racism. It points to Pope Pius XI’s 1937 encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge*, condemning Nazi ideology and “another major encyclical on the unity of the human race, which was to condemn racism and anti-Semitism.” The Justice and Peace Commission document goes on to explain that death overtook the Pope before he could make it public and that his successor, Pope Pius XII, took elements from it for his first encyclical (*Summi pontificatus*) and for his 1942 Christmas message (*Origins*, 1989, 617).

But the neuralgic issue of the Church’s accountability for contributing to the Holocaust extends far beyond questions of silence, unpreparedness, and the personality of a pope. Much more at issue is the centuries-long policy and behavior classically described by Jules Isaac as the Church’s “teaching of contempt” and its relationship to the

Holocaust. Shortly after the war, fifty years ago, Protestant historian James Parkes stated flatly:

In our day and within our own civilization, more than six million deliberate murders are the consequence of teaching about Jews for which the Christian Church is ultimately responsible, and of an attitude toward Judaism that is not only maintained by all the Christian Churches, but has its ultimate resting place in the teaching of the New Testament itself (Fisher, 1981, 119).

Elsewhere Parkes wrote of the unbroken line that leads from the beginnings of Christianity and its denigration of Judaism, through the horrors of the Middle Ages, to the death camps of our own day (Parkes, 1963, 60). Rosemary Radford Ruether also drew a very direct line from Christian teaching to Auschwitz in her controversial book *Faith and Fratricide*. There she called antisemitism the “left hand of Christology” and claimed that the theological roots of antisemitism constitute an essential element of traditional Christian belief. Authors speak of Christian antisemitism as among the “approaches” to Auschwitz (Rubenstein-Roth), one of the “roots” of the Holocaust, or its “indispensable seedbed” (Pawlikowski). In the opinion of Donald Dietrich, it is now almost universally recognized that Christian teaching and practice “helped prepare the ground” that made the Holocaust possible (Dietrich, 1995, 5).

The careful search for appropriate metaphors is indicative not only of the sensitivity of the question for Christians but also of its complexity. For the issue is not one of individual Christians and their personal guilt but of Christianity, the institutional Church, and the impact of its teachings on Western culture. And here, once again, a metaphor is significant. If Jews were seen as marked with the sign of Cain on their foreheads, that symbolism, as much as anything, preserved them from genocide. Cain was not to be killed (Gen 4, 15). The traditional Roman Catholic attitude toward Jews was an ambivalent amalgam of toleration and aversion. Unlike pagans and heretics (for whom the choice when there was one—was either conversion or death), the Church officially allowed Jews to practice their religion.

In what became the normative opinion of St. Augustine, Jews were regarded as being punished like Cain for their part in the death of Jesus and their refusal to accept him as the Messiah. They were to wander the earth without a homeland, allowed to reside in Christian lands so as to witness to the truth of Christianity. Thus, on one hand, Church law in the Middle Ages called for the establishment of ghettos and the wearing of yellow badges, legal and moral precedents for much of the

Nazi racial legislation against Jews. But, on the other hand, the same legislation was equally clear in its attempts to protect Jews physically. Forced conversions and disruptions of Jewish worship services were banned. Violence against Jews was punishable with excommunication (Fisher, 1981, 120).

In light of this ambivalence, Jewish historian Yosef Yerushalmi has argued against those who directly link John's gospel to the gas chambers. Why, he asks, if genocide had been latent in Christian teaching, was there no attempt at annihilating the Jews of Christendom in the Middle Ages when the Church had power to enforce its beliefs? His conclusion is nuanced:

There is no question but that Christian anti-Semitism through the ages helped create the climate and mentality in which genocide, once conceived, could be achieved with little or no opposition. But even if we grant that Christian teaching was a necessary cause leading to the Holocaust, it was surely not a sufficient one (Fleischner, 1977, 103).

This is also the opinion of Eugene Fisher: Christian antisemitism was but one of several remote causes. "While the centuries-long Christian teaching of contempt may have been a *sine qua non* in the complex of conditions which brought about the Holocaust, so too was the breakup of Christendom" (Fisher, 1981, 121). Again, to quote Yerushalmi: "The Holocaust was the work of a thoroughly modern, neopagan (secularist) state. . . . The slaughter of the Jews by the state was not part of the medieval breakdown of Christian world-order. It became possible with the breakdown of that order" (Fleischner, 1977, 103–4).

Like Yerushalmi, scholars writing on the subject have generally agreed that there is an essential difference between Christian anti-Judaism and racist antisemitism, that something new entered into the socio-historical picture that made the Holocaust possible in our century, when it was not even conceivable during the Christian middle ages. I refer here to more than the modern technology and bureaucratic efficiency that made the Holocaust technically achievable. Modernity also eroded traditional religious restraints upon human behavior and unleashed ideologies that were not only anti-Jewish and anti-Christian but avowedly pagan.

John Pawlikowski has written of a "new sense of freedom" that allowed Nazi theoreticians to conceive of reshaping society and creating a Nietzschean *Übermensch* (Schüssler Fiorenza-Tracy, 1984, 44). Rabbi Irving Greenberg finds the *novum* in secularity itself. When society is

striped of respect for a transcendent God, “secular authority unchecked becomes absolute . . . leading directly to the assumption of omnipotent power over life and death on the part of the state” (Fleischner, 1977, 29). In other words, there is a discontinuity between the Christian anti-Judaism and the Nazi racism that made the Holocaust possible, a discontinuity that is left completely unremarked and undetected when both are subsumed under the same word “antisemitism.”

ON DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

“To define antisemitism,” it has been suggested, “is to ask what made Auschwitz possible—which is to say, among other things, that it has taken Auschwitz to put the question on the agenda” (Moore, 1990, 10). Owing more to Hitler than to scholarly discourse, the meaning of “antisemitism” changed in 1945. The word today is generally accepted without cavil as history’s “longest hatred,” stretching over two millennia and more in a disconcerting and deadly continuity (Wistrich). The origins of the word, however, and my own research on the Church and antisemitism in interwar Poland both reveal that, before the Holocaust, antisemitism had a much more ambiguous, far less pejorative meaning, comparable very much to the word “anti-Zionism” today.

The German word *Antisemitismus* was originally coined in the 1870s by Wilhelm Marr, an anti-Christian atheist. Marr wanted to replace anti-Judaism, with its religious connotations, with a term that would indicate that the Jews were a racial unit. Despite the original intentions behind the neologism, it was taken over as well by German Christians who were concerned about preserving a Christian Germany. In the opinion of Marr’s biographer, the term apparently won wide circulation not only because of its scientific pretensions but also its lack of clarity. It cast a cloak of uncertainty over the intent of the hostility toward Jews. Like the word “anti-Zionism” today, it attempted to evade the accusation of engaging in something improper (Zimmermann, 1986, 94, 113).

Few scholars have given more critical thought to the meaning of the word antisemitism and the peculiarity of the phenomenon it represents than Stanford University professor and medievalist Gavin Langmuir. He has spent much of his professional career as an historian examining anti-Judaism in Western culture and reflecting on the nature and meaning of antisemitism which he insists correctly is different from other kinds of prejudice.

Langmuir breaks with the scholarly consensus that sees modernity as the locus for the emergence of antisemitism as distinct from anti-Judaism. He argues by analogy to the origins of antisemitism in the

early Middle Ages with the accusations of ritual murder, the infamous blood libel (which he calls “ritual cannibalism”), and host desecration. For Langmuir the irrationality of those medieval Christian accusations links them directly to the biological fantasies of the Nazis. In both instances “the Jew” was a symbol for a menace that has nothing to do with empirically observed Jewish men, women, and children.

Langmuir attempts to redefine antisemitism not as simple hostility against Jews but a “chimerical” hostility aroused by irrational thinking about Jews. He argues that there is more than a quantitative difference between pre-Christian or early Christian hostility against Jews and Nazi antisemitism and that simply defining antisemitism as “ethnic prejudice” against Jews fails to capture the fact that there was something uniquely evil in the quality of Nazi antisemitism. Defining antisemitism as irrational or chimerical hostility distinguishes it from the “normal” or what Langmuir calls “realistic” prejudice common to all ingroups in their attitude toward outgroups who do not share their values and who compete with them for scarce goods (Langmuir, 1990, 311–52, at 328–29)

Langmuir can be read as arguing that, while Christianity was not the only source of Nazi antisemitism, it was the most important one. While he acquits Christianity as such, he indicts the medieval Church for inventing chimerical antisemitism as a defense against its doubts. Langmuir’s historical analysis and metahistorical theories are too complex and important to allow a mere summary here. My own focus of interest here is the fact that Langmuir refuses to hyphenate the word “antisemitism.” He argues: “Since there is in fact no such thing as ‘semitism,’ save when referring to a language, the term is literally meaningless when applied to Jews” (Langmuir, 1990, 16).

As is obvious to the attentive reader of this essay, I agree with Langmuir’s punctuation. But I do not agree to his cavalier dismissal of the term “semitism” as historically meaningless. Langmuir’s area of expertise is medieval western Europe. My own reading of material from modern eastern Europe, specifically Poland, indicates that “semitism” in inter-war Catholic circles was tantamount by virtue of synecdoche to the word “liberalism,” a concept that is certainly ambiguous but not meaningless. I would contend that any study of modern Catholic antisemitism in conjunction with the Holocaust must take into consideration as its context the Church’s century and a half struggle against political liberalism.

The 1989 Vatican document on racism points out not in the text but in a footnote that “on March 25, 1928, a decree of the Holy Office condemned anti-Semitism” (*Origins*, 1989, 625, n. 9). Perhaps the reason that statement was tucked into a footnote is the fact that this first ex-

plicit Catholic condemnation of antisemitism was contained almost parenthetically within a decree that suppressed the *Amici Israel*, a Catholic organization founded precisely to promote philosemitism, a fact that certain Vatican circles would probably prefer forgotten.

The *Amici Israel* (Friends of Israel) was an association of priests founded in Rome in 1926. Its members pledged themselves to pray for the conversion of Jews and refrain from antisemitic speech. The *Amici* promised not to speak of the Jews as a deicidal people somehow peculiarly responsible for the death of Christ. Instead they were to teach about the special love God had for the Jewish people.

Within only two years of its founding, the *Amici Israel* was suppressed. The decree of Holy Office (March 25, 1928), approved by Pope Pius XI, praised the association's work and prayer for the conversion of Jews, and, as was mentioned, for the first time a Vatican statement condemned antisemitism by name: "Because [the Holy See] reproveth all hate and animosity among peoples, it condemns most especially the hate against the once-chosen people of God, that hate that today is called by the name antisemitism." But then the decree continued, the Holy Office was suppressing the Friends of Israel because of "a manner of acting and thinking contrary to the opinion and spirit of the church, to the thinking of the Holy Fathers, and to the very liturgy" (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 1928, 103–4).

The Vatican decree gave nothing by way of a more explicit explanation for the Holy Office's drastic action. An explanation could be inferred, however, from a documentary article on the decree in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, justifiably regarded as a semiofficial organ of the Holy See. Within its pages one could receive clarification for the often encoded or merely suggestive language of official Vatican statements, since its editorial positions were openly known to have been given prior approval by the Vatican Curia. Thus, when the Friends of Israel was condemned, *La Civiltà Cattolica* explained that the Vatican's action was directed at both antisemitism and "semitism" (*semitismo*). The *Amici Israel* "always defended and excused Jews" while ignoring their "undeniable alliance with Freemasons" and other subversive societies, all of which constituted the "Jewish peril" (*La Civiltà Cattolica* 2, 1928, 335–44).

The most succinct description of what *La Civiltà Cattolica* meant by *semitismo* was the "social predominance" in all areas of modern life accorded to Jews by liberalism. Thanks to liberalism Jews now enjoyed the highest positions in industry, banking, diplomacy, and "even more in secret sects plotting their world domination." Jews together with the "liberal, masonic movement" were responsible for a religious persecution of Catholics and the clergy. By favoring Jews, liberalism had

allowed the "Jewish danger" to increase steadily, so that Jews now constituted a "threat" to all the world, especially to Christian nations. Though one could not ascribe all the ills of modern society to Jews, it was clear that, as the Jews were involved in the French Revolution, so too was there a "prevalence" of Jews in the Russian and more recent Hungarian revolutions with all their cruelty and horror.

As for antisemitism, *La Civiltà Cattolica* made it clear that the Church did not hate or harass Jews unjustly. In fact, "the Catholic Church intends to protect as it has in fact always protected even its enemies and fiercest persecutors such as the Jews." Those guilty of antisemitic "excesses" were politicians and "so-called patriotic movements" who, rather than remove the cause of semitism, namely liberalism, instead repress the "inevitable effects" of liberalism. Thus in condemning the *Amici Israel*, the Holy See was charting a middle road between extremes. The semitism represented by the Friends of Israel was "an extreme no less dangerous" than antisemitism and, in fact, was "even more seductive" because it posed under the aspect of good.

Until recently, the idea of a Masonic-Jewish alliance, alluded to here by the editors of *La Civiltà Cattolica*, had been largely forgotten, neglected even by writers on Christian-Jewish relations and the Holocaust. It originated in mid-nineteenth-century Germany but first flourished in France, where Jews were well represented and had a high profile in the Masonic movement. France's influential Catholic daily *La Croix* unabashedly described itself as "the most anti-Jewish newspaper in France." The point of contention between Catholic traditionalists and liberal republicans was no less than defining what it meant to be French. *La Croix* saw Freemasons and Jews as the natural enemies of a Catholic France (Arnal, 1985, 33).

In interwar Poland, the classic land of refuge for Jews, the point at issue was the same. The supposedly singular blame Jews bore for the death of Jesus may have been assumed and beneath the surface, but almost never was it articulated. My own research into interwar Polish Catholic history reveals that the Church's century-long struggle against political liberalism was not only present but central to the efforts of the Polish hierarchy and clergy to create or preserve what they conceived of as a "Catholic Poland."

There were over three million Jews in Poland, most of them religiously orthodox. But, like their co-religionists in the West, considerable numbers of them had begun the process of assimilation, putting aside a segregated religious orthodoxy and appropriating Polish culture as their own. This phenomenon obviously could not help but hinder the Church's aspirations of a "Catholic Poland." A Polish culture that Jews could call their own, needless to say, would have to be secular.

Antisemitism defined as hatred was in no way acceptable to Catholic doctrine. But if it was defined as a synonym for antiliberalism and anti-secularism, antisemitism was regarded by leading Catholics as a political stance that was at once justified and legitimate. Jesuit moralist Gustav Gundlach was one of the authors of the encyclical on racism commissioned by Pope Pius XI but not issued because of his death. Gundlach wrote the article on "Antisemitismus" for the 1930 edition of the *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*. In it he denounced racist antisemitism as unchristian because it contradicted Christian love of neighbor. But what he called "political antisemitism" was permitted, so long as it used morally admissible means to counteract the "exaggerated and harmful influence" of Jews over the economy, politics, press, science, and the arts" (Gundlach, 1930, 1:504-5). Obviously Gundlach was not referring here to self-segregated orthodox Jews but to the assimilated Jews who were contributing to the secularization of Europe's formerly Christian culture.

CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted to highlight some facts and issues that are too often given too little attention or too little weight by theologians and Church leaders. If I may draw some inferences from the foregoing and express my own judgments, I would offer the following theses:

1) The Holocaust, the Nazis' attempted annihilation of European Jewry, is certainly singular in several aspects, but it is not totally unique. It does allow of analogies on several other fronts with other genocides and other horrific examples of human destruction. In other words, despite all appeals and efforts to the contrary, the Holocaust has become and will continue to be a metaphor for other examples of evil on a massive scale.

2) There is no question but that Christianity and the Church's "teaching of contempt" contributed to the climate that made the Holocaust possible. As such, to use a metaphor from the field of contract law, it was one of a complex of conditions. But it was neither a sufficient condition, nor the principal or most important condition, as some would claim without empirical demonstration of any kind.

3) A study of Christian anti-Jewish hostility on the eve of the Holocaust reveals a vast qualitative distinction between the Church's "political," what Gavin Langmuir calls "realistic," prejudice against Jews and the racist antisemitism of the Nazis. Assimilated European Jews had an obvious self-interest in seeing the Catholic Church disestablished and privatized. They had every reason to join Freemasonic efforts to promote liberal governments and secular culture in what formerly had been Christian states. And the leadership of the Catholic

Church had an obvious self-interest in opposing them. Their mutually exclusive interests led Catholics to regard Jews and Freemasons tout court as “enemies of the Church.” The hostility may have been mutual, but that does not excuse the fact that the Church’s blanket opposition to political liberalism was short-sighted and mistaken.

4) With respect to Catholic-Jewish relations, the watershed that was the Second Vatican Council did not result only from *Nostra aetate*. That the Council repudiated the tradition of blaming Jews for the death of Jesus and the idea of God has rejected Jews was of incalculable import. Catholic theologians and in their wake Vatican documents have not been slow to tease out significant implications from those teachings. But just as important was the Council’s break with the Church’s previous illiberal stance that error has no rights. *Dignitatis humanae*, the Council’s declaration on religious liberty, is just as revolutionary and important for Catholic-Jewish relations. Neither truth nor error but only people have rights, and they have those rights whether they are in error or not. Unfortunately, the Vatican has yet to develop the implications of that teaching for itself and for the Church’s role in modern pluralistic society. The new climate of respect, dialogue, and cooperation between Catholics and Jews would have been unthinkable without what we in the United States call Jeffersonian democracy, what traditionalist European Catholics once called Jewish or Masonic democracy.

5) Both the Holocaust and the Church’s tradition of anti-Judaism warrant the attention of more than a handful of theologians who happen to be interested and involved in Catholic-Jewish relations. John Pawlikowski focuses on their importance for contemporary Christology. Donald Dietrich points to the need for moral theology to cease obsessing with the micromorality of individuals to face up to the macroevil present in institutions, societies, and cultures. Johann-Baptist Metz argues that Auschwitz requires a revision not only of Christian theology regarding Jews but of Christian theology altogether. To this I would only add the need for the Church to repudiate its historical tendency to triumphalism.

6) There are unresolved disputes involved in questions like the civil rights of sexual minorities in this country, of the integration of Muslim minorities into European society, of the proper role of women in the Church and workplace. Given the experience of this century, the Church’s leadership may not responsibly allow itself to contribute to a climate that promotes or even appears to excuse violence against a perceived threat by an outgroup. Awareness that the Church contributed, even if indirectly and unwittingly, to the Holocaust has rightly led individual leaders of the Church to express sorrow for the Church’s fail-

ures with respect to its historic attitude toward Jews and Judaism. The Vatican plans a major statement on the subject. My own query is, who are the supposed "enemies of the Church" today? And the reminder that, in Catholic tradition, true contrition must always be joined to a firm purpose of amendment.

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