

CCJR ANNUAL MEETING PROCEEDING

Eschatology and the Ideology of Anti-Judaism

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This talk grows out of a lengthy study about the path the Catholic Church took to undo the ideology of anti-Judaism.¹ At its heart are a small group of Catholic intellectuals, mostly converts, who pushed forward this change, beginning in the 1930s and extending to the Second Vatican Council, which concluded in 1965.

Ideology is a coordinated system of ideas that acts to shape as well as limit thought. People adhere to ideology without full awareness of its elements and their interrelation.² Ideology can develop power beyond their conscious control. I will have more to say about its precise contours below, but anti-Judaism featured a central assumption that Jews had lost touch with God and were destined to suffer a history of punishment until, at the end of time, they finally turned to Christ, the “Jewish Messiah.” I am not saying that all Christians consciously assented to these ideas; from the little research that has been done on Catholic anti-Judaism across borders, it would seem to have varied from region to region. The idea that Jews had “killed God,” for instance appears to have been much stronger in East Central Europe in the interwar period than it was in North America. Still, as exemplified by the anti-racist Jesuit John LaFarge, when Catholics did turn their mind to the “Jewish question” in the 1930s, anti-Judaism is what

¹ John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother: The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012),

² For general guidance on the subject, see Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991).

they found in tradition as well as interpretations of scripture.³ And that severely limited engagement in favor of Jews by those guided by Christian thought.

I want to start my discussion of the power of this ideology in Nazi-occupied Lithuania at the end of the winter of 1943, just before the liquidation of a ghetto the occupiers had created at the small town of Swiecany, a place with mixed population: Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian.

The Jew Batya Weksler pleaded with the Christian Pole Emilia Waszkiniel to take her infant son Jakub and raise him as her own. Waszkiniel was afraid. After all, people giving shelter to Jews faced the death penalty. Also, she and her husband were very poor. They did not even have their own apartment. But Weksler insisted. “You are a Christian,” she said. “You believe in Jesus. Jesus was a Jew. Rescue this Jewish infant in the name of the Jew in whom you believe.”

Waszkiniel agreed and one night received the child huddled in a blanket. She explained why thirty-six years later in a conversation with this child now grown into a man, her son Romuald, a Catholic priest: “I couldn’t not take you. That would have been like renouncing my faith. I said to myself: if you believe in Jesus Emilia, then you have to save this child.”⁴

Emilia Waszkiniel was a pious woman. Pious women, pious Christians, are not so rare in Eastern Europe. Why did not more see the Jew Christ in the Jews being taken to their deaths? Why did not more see a special relation between their savior and Jews facing extinction?

³ Thus Lafarge, presumably otherwise well-meaning, found himself in thrall of key components of anti-Judaism, ironically and tragically, in the midst of composing an encyclical against racism (it was never released). See Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 98-101.

⁴ Dariusz Rosiak, *Człowiek o twardym karku. Historia księdza Romualda Jakuba Wekslera-Waszkinieła* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2013), 34-35.

In fact what we often see and hear in reminiscences of Jews who survived is indifference, callousness and occasional hostility on the part of Christians. Not only did they not see Christ in Jews, often they hardly saw a neighbor, a neighbor toward whom the most basic Christian teaching should have applied:

Teacher which commandment in the law is the greatest?

He said to him, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Mt 22: 37-39 NAB).

In the story in which Jesus speaks to the question: who is my neighbor, the answer is that “neighbors” are ethnic others.

Returning to wartime Europe. Consider the recollection of Jehoszua Zoberman, town councilor and head of a sporting club in Sandomierz in Southeastern Poland. Here is what struck him in reminiscing in 1946 the attack upon Jews in the ghetto in Sandomierz perpetrated on 17 November 1942 by the SS as well as Ukrainian and Polish police: “Three thousand living beings murdered by a few hundred ruffians in clear sight of the entire non-Jewish population, and no one tries to stop it, no one stands up for us, all of us unfortunate, alone, condemned to death—that is our fate. That is our fate.”⁵

Poles feel justifiably aggrieved when people treat Christian antisemitism as simply a Polish story. It was not simply a Polish story. Memoirs from places as different as Hungary, Bosnia, and Bohemia reveal this same sort of indifference that we see in Sandomierz. Jews were lowest on any scale of

⁵ Michał Grynberg and Maria Kotowska, eds., *Życie i zagłada Żydów polskich 1939-1945. Relacje świadków* (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 2003), 229.

obligation that people felt toward neighbors. They faced greater indifference than any other population in Europe. Here is a recollection from the acclaimed Hungarian dissident and author, George Konrád, of his return in 1945 to Berettyóújfalu, the small Eastern Hungarian town from which the other Jews (including two hundred classmates) had been taken to Auschwitz the previous summer. “The townspeople,” he recalled, “had generally made no comment about the Jews being carted off. Some had even laughed at the sight of old people struggling with their bags, and indeed they were laughable, thinking they would have need of their things, their familiar pillows and blankets, when what was awaiting them was the crematorium. The fact that they were loaded onto trains was met with the same indifference as news from the front or draft notices or the appearance of bombers over the town on a sunny morning; they were all so many historical events over which one had no control. It was the indifference that comes of an acceptance of fate mingled with fear and perhaps relief.”⁶ We hear very similar sentiments from the Czech Jewish survivor Heda Kovaly, who went back to the village where her grandmother had lived:

I did not visit the farm. It had been taken over by strangers after the war. My grandmother’s cottage looked neglected. Everything in it seemed even smaller than before. A kind old neighbor let me in and showed me where everything had happened. “See?” she said. “Here’s where your grandmother set down her cup of coffee just before the Germans came. And here she sat with me for a while and I told her, ‘Mrs. Bloch, don’t be afraid...’”

I know there was nothing anyone could do. But they were taking away an 86-year old grandmother to a horrible death, and the village where she had lived all her

⁶ George Konrád, *A Guest in My Own Country. A Hungarian Life*, translated by Jim Tucker and edited by Michael Henry Heim (New York: Other Press, 2007), 103.

life, where everybody loved her, had just looked on. The only thing anyone had had to say was, “Mrs. Bloch, don’t be afraid...”⁷

During the war the citizens of Sarajevo, Bosnia (part of the fascist Independent State of Croatia) banded together to protect each other: Muslims, Catholic Croats, and Orthodox Serbs. The Serbs were under grave threat and faced genocidal policies in many other places under Ustasha rule. However, the city’s ten thousand Jews perished almost entirely.⁸

My thesis is that this indifference rested upon a deep substratum of belief, shared even by people who had become “post-Christian,” but which was exceptionally strong in places like Poland and Lithuania. In many cases, Christians agreed with Joshua Zoberman: Suffering was the Jews’ fate. Why? Because they had killed God. This widespread belief among Christians was never made formal by the Church’s teaching authority, but still, it was widely accepted from the early days of the Church, and over the centuries grew into a formidable ideology.

My book details the path taken by Catholic (and more generally Christian) theology to break with this ideology, with this history of anti-Judaism, with the idea that the fate of Jews was suffering. The break took place two decades after the end of World War II in the fall of 1965, when Catholic bishops approved the declaration *Nostra Aetate*, which was among the documents promulgated at the Second Vatican Council, an event meant to bring the church “up to date” in the modern age.

⁷ Heda Margolius Kovaly, *Under a Cruel Star: A Life in Prague 1941-1968*, translated by Helen Epstein (London: Holmes and Meier, 1989), 66.

⁸ For an excellent account of these and many other matters, see Emily Greble, *Sarajevo, 1941-1945: Muslims, Christians and Jews in Hitler’s Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 114-115.

There were many other statements, for example on religious liberty, or the place of the Church in the world, but this one was arguably the most contested. *Nostra Aetate* dealt with the Church's relation to non-Christian religions and part four was about the Jewish people. I contend that the change the bishops voted on was not automatic, but involved struggle, both moral and intellectual, to deconstruct the old and replace it with the new.

What was the structure of this old belief, that we call anti-Judaism? It had three interlocking, mutually supporting components. First: anti-Judaism denies the Jewishness of Christ, projecting Christ as somehow outside Judaism, as in fact an anti-Jewish Christian. Second, it says the Jews are destined to suffer for killing Christ, and third, that until Jews become Christian this suffering will continue.

The last point was often taken to be eschatological. The punishment would cease at the end of time, when Jews would massively recognize Christ as Messiah, thus opening the way to the last days, the parousia, Christ's second coming, when the world would finally be redeemed. The recognition of the need to accomplish this task imposed upon the Church a mission to the Jews, so that Jews finally say yes to the Jewish messiah.

At Vatican II in the 1960s, undoing the first two components was relatively easy. Scripture makes the Jewishness of Christ and his family and friends clear. Let us go back to Emilia Waszkiniel. She may have been uneducated but she knew that Jesus was Jewish. Did the Jews kill Christ? The scriptural basis for the claim that they did is Matthew 27:25, in which "all the people" proclaimed that the blood of Christ would be upon them and their children. Cardinal Bea, the head of the Secretariat charged with formulating the new language that went into *Nostra Aetate*, could undo this charge relatively easily. The crowd in Matthew 27, which was not identified as Jewish let alone Israel, could not speak for all Jews, most of whom were not even in Judea, and had never heard of Christ.

It was the third component, the eschatological one that imposed an enduring mission on the church, which caused real difficulty, almost making any statement about the Jews at Vatican II impossible. The issue culminated in a crisis of the spring and summer of 1964, a point at which a team of theologians at the heart of my study had been at work for about three years and arrived at a draft that seemed sound. Yet unbeknownst to them, advisors close to Pope Paul VI took this draft and added new wording: "It is also worth remembering that the union of the Jewish people with the church is part of the Christian hope. The church waits with unshaken faith and deep longing for the entry of that people into the fullness of the people of God established by Christ."

The hope, in essence, of these words was that one people would absorb another. The new text was supposed to be secret, yet soon it became the topic of news stories all over the world; protests were registered from the American Jewish Committee and B'nai B'rith. Most effective in drawing attention to the problem were the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel. "If faced with the alternative of conversion or death" Heschel was "ready to go to Auschwitz at any time."⁹

One might wonder: why all this fuss? There was no talk in the new wording of active mission to the Jews let alone forced conversion. The statement reflected a vague hope, making reference to a passage in Paul's letter to the Romans that seems to refer to the end of time. It pronounced an eschatological vision and was about as distant and unreal as one can imagine. Why be so sensitive about something that was supposed to occur at the edge of historical time? It would seem that this prayer was not a direct threat to anyone.

Let us return to the war years to see where Heschel's intuition came from. Why did he connect this eschatological

⁹ "Ecumenism: What Catholics Think about Jews," *Time*, September 11, 1964.

vision with Auschwitz? What does conversion have to do with murder?

The issue for Heschel, I think, was not active mission but rather the vision of Jews implicitly contained in the statement. Note that reference in the new wording was not to individual conversions but to the union of the whole Jewish people with the Church. That is, the Church hoped not that some or many Jews would turn to Christ but that all Jews without exception would do so: Jews as “Israel.” A people was supposed to cease being a people. According to how Jewish identity is understood, it meant that the Church looked forward to a moment when the Jewish people as such would cease to exist. Christians are not Jews. Therefore *the Church’s dearest hope involved the end of Judaism.*

In this old perspective, simple Jewish existence, far from a blessing, was a stumbling block, forestalling redemption. The basis of Christian anti-Judaism was thus about far more than the accusation that Jews had killed God [deicide], it was about tying God’s hands and delaying redemption of the world, by virtue of the Jews’ simple existence. I think Heschel felt that this vision of the Jews, as destined to cease existing had helped make Auschwitz possible. Thus the link between Christian eschatology and the Nazis’ final solution.

This interpretation has some historical justification, but requires further empirical research. I mentioned earlier that what was striking in the behavior of Christians was indifference. The point is that this old view of the Jews as destined to disappear not only encouraged, but justified massive indifference and indeed occasional complicity of Christians during the Holocaust. We know that the penalties for assisting Jews in Poland were severe: death for oneself and one’s family. Nonetheless, some Poles did assist Jews; the number in Warsaw is estimated to have been between 70,000 to 90,000.¹⁰ However,

¹⁰ This is the estimate of Gunnar Paulsson, who believes that some 28,000 Jews were hiding in Warsaw before the outbreak of the 1944 Uprising. See

recollections we possess from those who acted out of Christian motives suggests that they had to overcome inner resistance. One Jew who escaped Majdenek was refused shelter by a Pole who said the following: “If God takes no pity on your people, how can you expect pity from a human being?” Another recalled being told by a neighbor after the war why she had brought the Gestapo to her mother’s hiding place: “It was not Hitler who killed the Jews. It was God’s will and Hitler was his tool. How could I stand by and be against the will of God.” A Polish inmate of Birkenau told a Jewish fellow prisoner: “You Jews have crucified Christ and that is why a curse is upon you, an eternal curse.”¹¹ Individual Polish priests helped Jews with great courage, but by and large the Polish clergy preached disdain for Jews, in sermons dating from before the war.¹² The Jesuit Stanislaw Musial, who studied the attitude of the Polish Catholic hierarchy during the war, found “nothing, no trace of compassion or concern. This is terrifying.”¹³

It was dangerous to shelter Jews, but it was also dangerous to shelter other Poles, for example soldiers of the Home Army, yet Poles did so with abandon.¹⁴ Christians who did assist Jews had two options: either to ignore anti-Judaic teachings going back to the early church, or to involve

Gunnar S. Paulsson, *Secret City: The Hidden Jews of Warsaw* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 5.

¹¹ Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 137.

¹² Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War*, edited by Joseph Kernish and Shmuel Krakowski (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 206. The Polish Catholic Church has not opened its archives to permit deeper study of these questions.

¹³ The historians Dariusz Libionka and Jan Grabowski reached similar conclusions based on extensive research. See Jan T. Gross with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 112-13.

¹⁴ Jan T. Gross, “A Tangled Web: Confronting Stereotypes Concerning Relations between Poles, Germans, Jews and Communists,” in Jan T. Gross, Istvan Deak and Tony Judt, eds., *The Politics of Retribution in Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 74-130.

themselves in cognitive dissonance. In my book I assert that those most likely to organize help and, in some cases rescue Jews before and during the war were those least likely to know about traditional theology, people who cared little or not at all for eschatology or deicide, but instead fell back upon basic teachings of love of neighbor or corporal works of mercy. These people had not been and indeed could not attend the seminaries where the complexities of theology were taught; in France, Germany, Austria, Poland and Hungary, Christians at the forefront of organizing assistance for Jews were women.¹⁵

One of those remarkable figures I would like to mention is the German Dr. Gertrud Luckner (1900-1995), born in Liverpool as Jane Hartman, and then raised by German parents. In 1934 she converted from Protestantism to Catholicism and became a Catholic pacifist. From 1939 she was involved in helping German Jews escape to Switzerland, and focused specially on the rescue of Jewish children. In late 1942, a fellow Catholic denounced Luckner, and the Gestapo arrested her in March of the following year on the train from Freiburg to Berlin with RM 1,000 intended for Rabbi Leo Baeck and the Jewish community in Berlin. After weeks of interrogation Luckner was sent to hard labor at Ravensbrück, and finally liberated 3 May 1945 by the Red Army while on a death march. I will return to her because she played a key role in efforts at Christian-Jewish reconciliation in the post war years.

I noted that Luckner had a doctoral degree, but it was in social work, not theology. There were those who took academic theology seriously and tried to develop a response to Nazism and Nazi antisemitism that was fully informed by the Catholic and Christian tradition, yet they found themselves involved in a growing schizophrenia. These were tiny handfuls of intellectuals, most converts, who operated beyond the borders of Nazi Germany (some were German refugees) in Austria and Switzerland and France from about 1934. They were active in the struggle against Nazism but also against

¹⁵ Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 42.

racism in the church. Their intellectual contributions, evidence of their struggle, is contained in a number of little known journals as well as a few books.¹⁶

Of this number I would like to focus on two. First: Johannes Oesterreicher (1904-1993), a Catholic priest of Jewish origin, once a left wing Zionist, who considered himself a missionary to the Jews, and in fact ran the mission to the Jews of the diocese of Vienna in the 1930s. As a person of Jewish origin he was unusually sensitive to the racism of this time, especially when he saw it entering the Church. In this period a number of influential Catholic thinkers argued that baptized Jews were second-class Christians because they still carried genetic matter that had been damaged by their people's rejection of Christ. The second figure is the amateur theologian and author Karl Thieme (1903-63), originally a man of the left (SPD) and also a convert, yet unlike Oesterreicher from Protestantism.

Both men were deeply learned, but also argumentative and hard-headed. Because they moved freely across a number of kinds of borders in their lives (religious, cultural, political) I call these converts border crossers. As people who had just crossed the border into Catholicism they were determined to be fully orthodox, yet as people who had left much of their past behind, they were not afraid to think in new ways. Wherein lay their schizophrenia?

On the one hand they rejected racism and the idea that Jews were inferior. They rejected (unlike most European Christians of their time) all discrimination, including quotas meant to limit numbers of Jews in certain professions; they likewise rejected talk of encouraging Jewish emigration. On the other hand, they found themselves captive to precisely the

¹⁶ The journals include *Die Erfüllung*, *Wiener Politische Blätter*, *Der Christliche Ständestaat*, and *Gerechtigkeit*, all published in Vienna between 1933 and 1938.

mindset that concerned Abraham Joshua Heschel: They desperately wanted Jews to join the Church.

But why? For what sake? It was for the sake of eschatology, a script they thought was given by Paul's Letter to the Romans. In Oesterreicher's view human history was approaching an end, and Jews had an important role to play. By massively converting to Christianity, they would help bring about Christ's second coming, and with that an end to the monstrous evils of Nazism. "When the stiffneckedness of Israel toward Christ is broken and it speaks its faithful 'Yes,'" Oesterreicher wrote in 1937, "a springtime of joy will come over the earth."¹⁷ If Israel had only accepted Christ during his time on earth, then God's Kingdom would have been realized then and there.¹⁸

In 1938 Thieme and Oesterreicher were expecting an apocalyptic cataclysm. From his perch in Basel, Thieme watched refugees desperately make their way to neutral Switzerland and wrote Oesterreicher (himself a refugee in Paris), that this was "only the 'beginning of the birth pangs.' Next year they will come in earnest...what we have before us is 'advent' after all! Therefore stand up and lift your heads because your redemption is near! We cannot repeat this often enough!"¹⁹

They imagined the travails of history, including the problems of their age as pushing the world toward that moment. Among those travails was antisemitism. "Anti-Semitism, sated as it is with the meanness and malice of the human being," Oesterreicher wrote in 1936 "remains a judgment sent by God. Would that Jewry understood this judgment."²⁰ Anti-Semitism was a form of redemptive suffering, and redemptive suffering was crucial to the Catholic tradition, something to be

¹⁷ Johannes M. Oesterreicher, "Die Juden und Das Reich Gottes," *Die Erfüllung* 3 (June 1937), 99.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

¹⁹ Thieme to Oesterreicher, Letter of December 2, 1938, Thieme Papers, Institute für Zeitgeschichte, Munich, Germany, ED 163/59.

²⁰ "Gericht und Erneuerung," *Die Erfüllung* 4 (November 1936), 185.

expected to overcome unredeemed human existence; it was shared by God himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Suffering was an evil and a good, but above all it was a necessity.

The eschatological mindset was not an isolated obsession of a few but seemed to impress the entire coterie of Catholic intellectuals in Paris at this time. It grew as the war approached. When Ribbentrop and Molotov signed their pact in August 1939, Jacques Maritain—perhaps the century’s most influential Catholic thinker—wrote his friend the later Cardinal Charles Journet that the “beast is revealing itself more and more.” He knew that the pact meant “war and catastrophe” but “from a spiritual point of view it will illuminate the consciences and gain the Church fighters for liberation.” Journet told Maritain of a visit he had just received from the eminent philosopher Dietrich von Hildebrand (like Oesterreicher a refugee from Central Europe). Despite the impending war Hildebrand was not “dejected.”²¹ In a book condemning racism and antisemitism published in Paris in 1940 (with a foreword by Maritain) Oesterreicher used similar language, writing that “the night that has fallen over the world is the night of the anti-Christ. Once more the beast of the Apocalypse has risen from the sea.”²²

²¹ Letters of 26, 29 August 1939. *Journet-Maritain: Correspondence*, vol. 2 (1930-1939), edited by Pierre Mamie and Georges Cottier (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg, 1997), 876-877. On Maritain’s apocalyptic view see Richard Francis Crane, *Passion of Israel: Jacques Maritain, Catholic Conscience and the Holocaust* (Scranton, PA: University of Scranton Press, 2010), 35-68.

²² He identified the monster who had risen as the “symbol of the anti-Christian empire, the imperialist power, which claims to be the ‘God of the present,’ and directs its power against God...the second beast that comes from the earth symbolizes the false prophet, who seeks to brace the power of the first. It is racial madness which serves to subjugate the peoples...but John also knows that the days of the beast are numbered.” John M. Oesterreicher, *Racisme, antisémitisme, antichristianisme: Documents et critique, traduit de l’allemand* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1940), 197, and John M. Oesterreicher, *Rassenhass ist Christenhass: Hitlers Judenfeindlichkeit in zeitgeschichtlicher und in heilsgeschichtlicher Sicht. Dokumente und Kritik* (Klagenfurt: Hermagoras/Mohorjeva, 1993), 159-60.

If the Jews did not share this insight into deeper truths of the age, that was their fault. “No one can approach the Jewish question of our day without expressing disappointment and sorrow,” Karl Thieme wrote in 1937, “that, by and large, Judaism did not see in the persecutions of recent years—in harmony with the constant warnings of the prophets a reason for self-examination and conversion to God and His anointed.”²³

Thieme wrote this not in a purposely anti-Judaic screed, but in the first concerted Catholic critique of antisemitism to appear in history. Jacques Maritain felt so embarrassed by the teaching of penalty resting upon the Jewish people that he prefaced his own essay opposing antisemitism (based in a famous talk he gave in Paris in 1937) with the following caveat: “If these pages are seen by Jewish readers, I hope they will agree that as a Christian I could only try from a Christian perspective to understand the history of their people.” Maritain would have preferred to strike a more brotherly tone, but Catholic theology appeared to leave no other choice. When he gave the essay as a talk in Paris, there were those who “took as personal ‘reproaches’ what was only a statement of the consequences of the drama of Calvary regarding the relation of Israel to the world.” He continued:

I should like to add that such words as “penalty” or “punishment” which we are obliged to use when we seek to elucidate human matters from the viewpoint of divine conduct of history, must be deprived of any anthropomorphic connotations...

The Jews (I do not mean the Jews individually, but the mystical body of Israel at the moment when it struck

²³ Catholic Association for International Peace, ed., *The Church and the Jews: A Memorial Issued by Catholic European Scholars*, translated by Gregory Feige (Washington, D.C.: Paulist Press, 1937), 14. The authors were Karl Thieme and Waldemar Gurian and the editor was Johannes Oesterreicher. The statement was supported by leading European Catholics, including Dietrich von Hildebrand and Jacques Maritain.

against the rock) the Jews at a crucial moment chose the world; they have loved it; their penalty is to be held captive by their choice. Prisoners and victims in this world which they love, but of which they are not, will never be, cannot be.²⁴

Maritain was arguing that a curse rested upon Israel, but somehow exempted individual Jews.

What this self-contradictory, eschatologically tinged thinking meant for the Church as whole, in Europe at least, was that it lacked a language to confront Nazi antisemitism. We see this tragically in that period's popes, especially Pius XII, who did not speak out against persecution of the Jews. Why do so if the Jews were cursed by God, meant to turn to Christ at the end of time? Yet the characters I study, though staunch opponents of the Nazi regime, likewise failed to find a language that would unequivocally express solidarity with the Jews.

That was not for lack of courage. In 1939 and 1940 Oesterreicher broadcast weekly sermons into the Reich from an émigré Austrian radio station in Paris. He called Hitler an unclean spirit that must be exorcised, unlike the pope spoke out clearly about Nazi crimes in Poland and identified the perpetrators as well as victims by nationality, and attempted with friends to get the Vatican to release German soldiers from their oath to Hitler. He was deeply frustrated at the Vatican's failure to condemn Hitler and called Pius XII "timid," all but accusing him of appeasement with fascists (for example in Spain). In 1940, Oesterreicher barely eluded the Gestapo in Paris, and then had a hair-raising escape to Lisbon through the Pyrenees with others hunted by the Germans, finally landing in Manhattan later that year.

²⁴ Jacques Maritain, *Redeeming the Time*, translated by Harry Lorin Binsse (London: The Centenary Press 1943), 125 and 133.

In the book I argue that lack of sympathy or engagement or courage was not the issue. The absence of a language, despite many words, written and spoken, was. Somehow, condemnation of antisemitism on the part of Nazism's Christian opponents was vitiated by the insistence that to be saved, Jews really had to become Christians (and of course it was only when they had that the institutional Church in much of Europe became truly active on their behalf, that is with organization and directives). Even in the eyes of Catholics who opposed Hitler, the only real cure for antisemitism was baptism.

Let us return to the 1964 crisis. At that point John Oesterreicher was himself at the Vatican. In 1961 he had been taken on as theological advisor to the bishops. At the council it was indeed the bishops who voted and therefore figure prominently in histories of the event. But they did not have expertise. Therefore experts produced draft statements—a bit in the way that speechwriters anticipate and formulate the thoughts of politicians. The bishops wanted statements that would be theologically unimpeachable. For the most part they wanted a strong statement against antisemitism. We know this because in archival records of their deliberations the word Auschwitz keeps coming up, and so does the name Rolf Hochhuth. Hochhuth was the German playwright who portrayed Pius XII as unconcerned about the killing of the Jews. The bishops felt embarrassed by the historical record (despite all defensiveness), and they did not want the Church to continue its silence. The bishops also knew, or more accurately, believed, that the Church could not suddenly reverse course on things Catholics had been taught for many centuries. (Though as noted above: the old teaching had never been formulated in an encyclical or teaching of the magisterium.) The Church lived by tradition.

So it was Oesterreicher and two other priests in September 1964 who had to go back to the drawing board to replace the language that suggested that the Jews must join the Church at the end of time. Here is what they came up with:

“The Church awaits the day, known to God alone, when all peoples will address him in a single voice and serve him shoulder to shoulder.” There is an eschatological vision here, (based in the minor prophet Zephaniah), and in keeping with a new reading of Romans 11 (in particular the closing lines where the apostles asks: “who has known the mind of God”) there is also a recognition that scripture does not provide a timetable or script about how Christians must imagine the final unity of humankind. There is no mention in this document of conversion or mission.

The new language seems simple yet it grew out of decades of intellectual and moral struggle. It was neither easy nor automatic and could not result from simple good will. Someone had to explain in terms of scripture why what had been taught for generations about the Jews was wrong, implicitly if not explicitly. The fact of the Shoah had not suddenly suggested to Christians that Jews did not need to become Christians *en masse*. I give the example in the book of Robert Brunner, a Swiss pastor at the forefront of efforts in Christian-Jewish reconciliation, who asked in the summer of 1945, whether there could be a Mission to the Jews after Auschwitz and the death of six million Jews. His answer was: of course there must be; if there had been more mission before the war, perhaps Auschwitz would not have happened.

John Oesterreicher and Karl Thieme felt the same way at this point. Yet, in 1950, Thieme made an about-face, and changed his views about Judaism so radically that he sensed this as a new conversion, an *Umkehr*. Suddenly he was saying that Jews were pleasing to God as Jews. How did he reach this view? The answer is that he did something almost unheard of before the war: he actually talked to Jews. I have in mind Martin Buber, with whom he had a lively correspondence, but also Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, the rabbis of Bern and Geneva and many more. He began to understand what insistence on conversion sound like to Jewish ears: It was not a path to salvation but spiritual death, the extinguishing of Judaism. Interestingly,

Christians began talking to Jews not out of a feeling of guilt, but out of a sense of being victims of Nazism.

Karl Thieme justified his radical change by turning to the one statement in the New Testament where the author explicitly tells followers of Christ what to make of the fact that most Jews did not accept Christ as Messiah (statements in Acts or the Gospels are not as direct). He focused on Paul's Letter to the Romans, sometimes called Paul's testament, probably his last letter and regarded as a summation of his thought and teaching. For centuries the elements of this letter that Thieme and other theologians now turned to had been neglected, or read in radically different ways (especially the eschatology).

How did he spread the word? Now I return to the former inmate of Ravensbrück mentioned above, Gertrud Luckner. In 1948, Luckner founded the *Freiburger Rundbrief* with the intention of combatting antisemitism. The *Freiburger Rundbrief* was a biyearly printed in thousands of copies and sent to Catholic and Protestant parishes throughout the lands where German was spoken (it was also practiced ecumenism), but to fill it with ideas that Christians would take seriously she needed theology. Good intentions did not suffice. For this she turned to Karl Thieme in nearby Basel and took him on as theological advisor. They gradually created a platform (based largely in Romans) and spread the message, opposed by many but also supported, for example by Oesterreicher at Seton Hall University in the United States or Paul Démann in France.

But as I said earlier the work was not easy, the new views were not popular; tensions built even among proponents of a new vision, for example between Thieme and Oesterreicher, who broke over mutual suspicions (especially Thieme's view that Oesterreicher thought of him as less than orthodox). They ceased communicating in 1960 and were not reconciled before Thieme died in 1963.

Still, in 1964, when Oesterreicher had a hand in drafting a new text for *Nostra Aetate*, he drew upon words formulated by his friend in the 1950s, giving the Church a language with which to break with the missionary perspective that had been Oesterreicher's own. The vision of the end of time in *Nostra Aetate* (based in words of the minor prophet Zephaniah) was formulated by Karl Thieme in 1954 for an ecumenical congress in Evanston, himself perhaps drawing on the work of Karl Barth and Moses Maimonides (thus truly ecumenical). But most of the new statement on the Jews in *Nostra Aetate* was based in Romans, just as had been the vision of the *Freiburger Rundbrief*. Thus the new teaching ratified in 1965 responds to the deeper structure of anti-Judaism.

Concluding Thoughts

This article has involved issues with deep moral stakes, in particular why an institution that claims to preach morality lacked language to condemn perhaps history's greatest crime while it was occurring. Yet, I hope I have not been moralistic or moralizing; that I have not made assumptions about what people should or should not have done 70 odd years ago, judging them with the benefit of hindsight, claiming that had I been around with my wisdom all problems would have been solved.

Instead what I hope I have done is not write a script for the past, but rather revealed a deep level of belief that shaped morality and to some extent structured conscience. Rather than writing a script for the past I have identified a script in the past, a script that Christians once wrote for Jews, in which Jews were scheduled in the future to behave not as free human actors but as unwitting accomplices in creating a world in which there was no more Judaism. Would it be a "triumph of God," Abraham Joshua Heschel asked the Jesuit Gustave Weigel in 1964, "if the scrolls of the Torah were no longer taken out of the Ark and the Torah no longer read in the synagogue, our ancient Hebrew prayers in which Jesus himself

worshipped no more recited, the Passover Seder no longer celebrated in our lives, the law of Moses no more observed in our homes? Would it really be *ad majorem Dei gloriam* to have a world without Jews?"²⁵

Heschel was envisioning the ultimate results of a world in which Jews suddenly entered the Church. As we know a world without Jews was also the vision of German National Socialism. I do not say that the Church collaborated in or desired the Holocaust, but this congruence in ultimate vision left it without a language to speak out unequivocally against anti-semitism.

That was especially so given the corollary of the Church's eschatological hope that Jews would enter the Church at the end of time. Until that point they were supposed to suffer for the supposed crime of rejecting Christ. Antisemitism seemed willed by God to produce this outcome. I call it a schizophrenic situation, a situation of attempting to embrace the sin (antisemitism) while rejecting the sinner (Nazism: both Pius XI and Pius XII were deeply disdainful of Nazism and viewed it as dangerous heresy).

Please note that we do not know how widespread this view was before Vatican II among rank and file Catholics. I sense that it was stronger in Central Europe than in North America, but that is an impression based in partial readings of Catholic journals from the period.

Finally, if *Nostra Aetate* is authoritative, why are there continued questions about God's covenant with the Jews, for example after Pope Benedict XVI's Good Friday prayer for the little-used Latin Rite in 2008? I argue in the book that *Nostra Aetate* continues to form the point of reference for the Church, as seen in the "correction" of Benedict's prayer

²⁵ Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, Susannah Heschel, ed., (New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1996), 246

almost immediately released by Walter Cardinal Kasper (then President of the Church's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews), and the pope's accession to Kasper's comment.²⁶ The issue requires continued study.

Eschatology is not the first explanation for Christian anti-Judaism, yet in some senses it is an ultimate one. Often we see theological arguments invoked to back up other agendas. A Christian antisemite of the 1930s might have resented Jews as rivals in business or scholarship, but argued in theological terms, projecting Jews as reprobate, as condemned by God. Some Christian missionaries carried out their mission to the Jews—and others—with little concern for the eschaton; their primary goal may have been to save souls.

But when one has accounted for such motivations for antisemitism and anti-Judaism, for the idea of Jewish deficiency, one is left with the idea, as Karl Thieme still wrote in the early 1950s (in the so-called Schwalbach theses), that the Jews' destiny was to become Christian. And *that* was where Abraham Joshua Heschel made his intervention. This Christian belief was a smoldering ember that remained after the rest of anti-Judaism has been deconstructed (as Cardinal Bea did at Vatican II); and only waiting for stimulation to blaze anew. It involved the presumption of "knowing" that Jews destined to disappear completely in historical time, of wishing for the end of Judaism, even if put off to a moment no one can imagine.

²⁶ "Wenn der Papst nun von der Bekehrung der Juden spricht," KATH.net, February 7, 2008, www.kath.net/detail.php?id=18969 (accessed July 15, 2011); John Borelli, "Troubled Waters: Catholic-Jewish Relations in the United States Have Grown Strained," *America*, February 22, 2010, 20–23.