

F. Littell, from The Crucifixion  
of the Jews

## IV

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### THE MEANING OF THE HOLOCAUST

Sensitive Jewish writers like Elie Wiesel and Emil Fackenheim have warned us against applying too facile explanations to the Holocaust and drawing too ready conclusions from it. The warning is especially pertinent for those whose normal intellectual discourse strains toward abstractions, generalizations, and rules. Certainly the warning must be heeded by gentiles, and when it comes from men who personally experienced the terrors of "the Final Solution," common decency commends silence. But the mind is drawn back repeatedly to the evidence of *the mass murder of Jews by Christians in the heart of Christendom*. Silence becomes impossible. Unless events are meaningless, in which case the biblical world view must be rejected as false, the compulsion to read the signs rests heavily upon any who think and feel.

One alternative has been presented by Richard Rubenstein, after what is certainly one of the most dramatic confrontations reported in contemporary theological literature. Let him tell his own story:

On August 17, 1961, at 4:30 in the afternoon, I had a two-hour conversation with Probst Dr. Heinrich Grüber at his home in Berlin-Dahlem. Dean Grüber had been the only German to testify in Jerusalem against Adolf Eichmann at the celebrated trial earlier that summer. He had a distinguished record in the defense of Jewish

rights, or at least, the right of Christians of "non-Aryan" origin, during the Nazi period. He had himself been a concentration camp inmate. We talked under almost apocalyptic conditions. American army tanks rumbled outside his home. He was pastor of a church in East Berlin. Living in West Berlin he was very upset that he was cut off from his flock. He began to use the imagery of the biblical theology of history to describe what was happening.

God was punishing a sinful Germany, he declared. He asserted that God was making Germans refugees as the Germans had made others homeless. Having commenced with his biblical interpretation of recent history, he could not stop until he asserted that it had been God's will to send Adolf Hitler to exterminate Europe's Jews. At the moment that I heard Grüber make that assertion, I had what was perhaps the most important single crisis of faith I have ever had. I recognized that Grüber was not an Antisemite and that his assertion that the God of the Covenant was and is the ultimate Author of the great events of Israel's history was no different from the faith of any traditional Jew. Grüber was applying the logic of Covenant Theology to the events of the twentieth century. I appreciated his fundamental honesty. He recognized that, if one takes the biblical theology of history seriously, Adolf Hitler is no more nor less an instrument of God's wrath than Nebuchadnezzar.

... I have had to decide whether to affirm the existence of a God who inflicts Auschwitz on his guilty people or to insist that nothing the Jews did made them more deserving of Auschwitz than any other people, that Auschwitz was in no sense a punishment, and that a God who could or would inflict such punishment does not exist. In other words, I have elected to accept what Camus has rightly called the courage of the absurd, the courage to live in a meaningless, purposeless Cosmos rather than believe in a God who inflicts Auschwitz on his people.<sup>1</sup>

Probst Grüber, as Rabbi Rubenstein affirmed, was one of the great men of the Christian resistance to Hitler. Yet the harsh, propositional lines which he drew from biblical orthodoxy repelled rather than commended the living God. Moreover, there was a heavy taint of abstraction—as there often is with dehydrated forms of religion. When he spoke as a German of the German experience, Probst Grüber spoke authentically. When he spoke abstractly, propositionally, about the Jewish experience, he was no longer a bona fide witness. He forgot who he

was, to whom he was speaking. Most serious in a Christian pastor, he forgot that the first question as to when to speak and when to keep silent is the question of how the hearer will be helped and the truth thereby served.

Probst Grüber was even then a venerable old man, and he had earned the right to make mistakes. Nothing this writer could say, and nothing Dr. Rubenstein wished to report, could reduce the fact that Probst Grüber was a faithful Christian churchman during long years when such were in very short supply.

But somewhere between treating events as absurd incidents and reading a harsh orthodoxy into them, a way needs be found for a walk of faith that practices a vital dialogue with the past and looks for the Kingdom to come. A sign pointing to that way is the tale or story. Probst Grüber had a far more important story to tell than a host of disciples of Ahimaaz, who like to talk all right, but have nothing to say, having never been where the action was (2 Samuel 18:22-23). But, caught in that moment in the heat of religious abstraction, he turned to the language of propositional orthodoxy and forgot the person listening and the story to be told.

We can learn much from that Jewish tradition which has not only encouraged the debate with God but revitalized the parables and allegories and tales that are so much closer to the heart of biblical truth than any logic and syllogisms and balanced mechanical models. Martin Buber has told of a rabbi whose grandfather was a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hassidism. Once upon a time, when the rabbi was asked to tell a story, he said:

A story must be told in such a way that it constitutes help in itself. My grandfather was lame. Once they asked him to tell a story about his teacher. And he related how the holy Baal Shem used to hop and dance while he prayed. My grandfather rose as he spoke, and he was so swept away by his story that he himself began to hop and dance to show how the master had done. From that hour on he was cured of his lameness. That's the way to tell a story.<sup>2</sup>

The reported signs of the Messiah are these: that the blind recover their sight, that the lame walk, that the captives are

freed. Nowhere is it recorded that one of the signs is this, that the preachers and teachers give consistent answers to philosophical questions.

Fundamental to the mystery, too, is the truth that a Jew has to choose to be a pagan, while the gentile has to choose not to be. Grüber's orthodoxy and Rubenstein's "paganism" are both more acceptable than the frivolity of those who will not recognize the time of their visitation, who have healed the hurt of the daughter of God's people slightly, who are not humbled even unto this day! Even today—with few blessed exceptions—the same posture of triumphalism rules the centers of church bureaucracy; the same lies are told about the Jewish people; the same impatient rejection of repentance and reform prevails; the same unreflective hostility to Israel rules the so-called Christian councils.

When the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held at Evanston in 1954, some delegates who had learned the lessons of the Church Struggle sought a clear statement of friendship on the relationship of the Christian churches to the Jewish people. Dutch, German, and French delegates were particularly insistent. On April 27, 1950, for example, the synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany had declared: ". . . by dereliction of duty and in keeping silent we also are guilty of the crimes committed . . . towards the Jews. . . . We pray all Christians to rid themselves of all antisemitism whatsoever, to resist it earnestly where it raises its head again."<sup>3</sup> They remembered past days. So too did the leader of the delegation from the French Reformed Church, whose then president (Marc Boegner) had in 1942 written the chief rabbi of Paris: "Our Church has authorized me to convey to you our feelings of embitterment and disgust at the racist laws which have been introduced in our country."<sup>4</sup> But the appeals of Charles P. Taft of Cincinnati and Charles Malik of Lebanon overcame the appeals of Berkhof and Maury and helped to prevent even a traditional statement about Christian indebtedness to "the Old Israel" from being adopted.

Visser't Hooft's summary of the situation is keenly perceptive:

What was going on behind all this? During the decisive vote, as I watched from the podium how the national delegations voted, I said to myself: the spirit of Hitler walks to and fro here, and up and down. Not as though one or the other was inoculated with Hitlerite Antisemitism. Things hung together in quite another way. I could see that the churchmen from countries which had been subjected for a shorter or longer time to National Socialist rule were almost all convinced that Israel had a central place not only in the previous but also in the future history of salvation. He who had experienced the satanic hatred against the Jews, for him the Pauline interpretation of the fate of Israel in the ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters of the Epistle to the Romans had a deep meaning. The others, who did not know the terrible drama of the destruction of European Jewry from their own observation, did not share this view of things. For them, every singling out of the Jews, every designation of a special historical role, remained in spite of the best intentions a kind of discrimination. Together with the little batch of Middle East Christians, who feared political misunderstandings, they made up the majority vote.<sup>5</sup>

This is precisely the problem in the ecumenical councils today: the lessons of the Holocaust and even the Church Struggle have not been mastered in most churches; the terrible guilt of Christendom and its centuries of false teaching about the Jews has only been admitted by those who learned of Nazi ideology and practice at first hand, and the tiny Christian ghettos in the Muslim world are primarily controlled by political considerations. With the rise of the "Third World" myth, the ecumenical movement and its chief organs are even less inclined to make the ruthless self-assessment and take the corrective measures necessary to reestablish Christian credibility. In America, where the delusions of nineteenth-century culture-religion are still regnant, only the impact of the preliminary stage of a new church struggle has served to move some churchmen to reflection and reappraisal.

The most significant practical results of a beginning reassessment in America have so far been threefold: (1) the release of a "Statement to Our Fellow Christians" by a working party of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox theologians;<sup>6</sup> (2) the founding of "Christians Concerned for Israel," a voluntary fel-

lowship with an occasional newsletter;<sup>7</sup> (3) an Annual Scholars' Conference on the Church Struggle and the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup> But the crucial long-range question is how the Christians are to reestablish their credibility vis-à-vis humanity, signaled in the concrete historical situation by the way they rework their relationship to the Jewish people. The Holocaust was the consummation of centuries of false teaching and practice, and until the churches come clean on this "model" situation, very little they have to say about the plight of other victimized and helpless persons or groups will carry authority. There is a symbolic line from Auschwitz to Mylai, but what the churches have to say about Mylai will not be heard until their voice is clear on Auschwitz. The tune must be played backward, the ball of scattered twine must be rolled up through the difficult and mysterious byways of the maze, before we come again into a blessed daylight of faith.

Finally, the meaning of the Holocaust for Christians must be built into the confessions of faith and remembered in the hymns and prayers. That was the turn in the road that most of the churches missed, and many of them are still plodding down a dead-end trail that leads away from the Kingdom of God. We Christians must go back to the turn in the road and reject the signs and signals which, expressing a spiritual and intellectual teaching which was false though familiar, turned us toward Auschwitz.

Nor is it enough to take the right turn for the sake of the church. Karl Barth was quite right in criticizing the Confessing church in 1936 for having shown no sympathy for the millions suffering injustice, for speaking out always on her own behalf. The theologian who condemned the church's seeking to gain her own soul also sensed and defined, though not as strongly as he later wished, the fatal error: "The question of the Jews is the questions of Christ."<sup>9</sup> "Anti-Semitism is sin against the Holy Ghost."<sup>10</sup> Right! For Christians, Antisemitism is not just a peculiarly nasty form of race prejudice; Antisemitism is blasphemy—a much more serious matter!

When the Christians denied their obligations to the Jews, the way to boasting and triumphalism was opened wide, and most

churchmen are still marching cheerfully through it. Even the Confessing church, though it came closer to the issue than most, spoke no clear word for the Jews at the Barmen Synod (1934) and never mentioned the Holocaust in the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt (1945)!

The Christians must draw the knife on their own Antisemitism for the sake of the truth, not to save the church but for love of Jesus of Nazareth and his people. There remains far too much of cunning and calculation, even among Christians well disposed toward the Jews. For example, a fine churchman has recently called on Christians and Jews to unite against the "secularism" which reduces all religious mysteries: "Believing Christians and believing Jews, living on their isolated islands, have been battered by a sea of unbelievers. We must build a bridge between those islands."<sup>11</sup> This is not good enough: (1) It is calculating, whereas brotherhood-love is spontaneous and unbounded. (2) It presupposes a parity of guilt and goodwill between the "islands." As a matter of fact, the relationship of Christendom to the Jewish people has been so wretched for so long that a number of outspoken Jewish leaders say frankly that they expect nothing and desire nothing from the Christians except that they keep their distance. We must earn our way back to the right to build a bridge, and that requires a flood of fraternal and loving actions of which we have so far proven quite incapable. (3) Finally, we need each other to be sure, but we Christians need Jewry first. The Jewish people can define itself in history without Christianity: Christians cannot establish a self-identity except in relationship to the Jewish people—past and present, and whenever the Christians have attempted to do so, they have fallen into grievous heresy and sin.

### *The Problem of Heresy*

While rights and liberties usually are close enough to the historical process to be specified, terms like *humanity* and *freedom* are abstractions that lend themselves readily to cloudy thinking. License is but freedom run wild, while religious liberty, for example, is a very concrete right; the great champions

of that right, the confrontations that strengthened it, and the documents that define it—all are specific and historical, and stories can be told about them.

The passion of the Enlightenment for abstractions, generalizations, and propositions and the hostility of the "enlightened" to the earthy, finite, and particular have produced a contempt for history and the unique event that has increasingly devitalized the language and dehumanized the word person. Thus it has come about that the worst crimes against human persons have been calculated, scientifically mounted programs, executed in the name of "humanity," "the new man," and "social progress." And the most un-Christian and anti-Christian actions have been justified by "Christian" theories and propositions that have taken leave of the human measure.

The application of mathematical formulae and models, the very "objectivity" and detachment which have contributed so much in the hard sciences, have led to Auschwitz, Babi Yar, the massacre in the Katyn forest, and the atrocity at Mylai. A common misstatement of the problem is that "science" is neutral and crimes are committed when science escapes the control of the humanities. The real problem is that a single pattern of thinking has become normative in sociology as well as chemistry, in political science as well as engineering, in theology as well as nuclear physics. A prideful contempt for the human person, his present condition and his past experience, stains the thoughts and visions of "modern man." Each age has been "the modern age" in turn, of course, but only in the last two centuries has the contempt for history and the lessons of past human experience become obsessive.

In a fine essay Karl Kupisch has described the collapse of historical consciousness. He shows that, although the awakening of the historical sense was the most important intellectual event in Germany after the Reformation, the Nazis began the swindle of historical relativism. Then since the war the motto has been "history-lessness," which leaves in the Third Reich and today nothing but the naked struggle for power.<sup>12</sup> The problem began earlier than the Third Reich, however, and it today affects circles far wider: Liberalism (abstractions), Fundamen-

talism (propositions), Marxism (dialectical dogmatics), and the whole body of modern thought. It derives from the relentless use of a single style of discourse, whereas the varied levels of human experience and thought are not exhausted even when all possible idioms are used.

The Jewish people is not only a discordant note in the "modern age" because the Jews stand for counterculture, but also because the Jews appear in Western history as carriers of a sense of history, a sense of history which is, among other things, "built upon a realization that the events of history are unique."<sup>13</sup> The flight from history has expressed itself in a number of ways prejudicial to the Jewish people. Emil Fackenheim, in his great essay denying a posthumous victory to Hitler, has summarized the common response to the historical event of the Holocaust: "Rather than face Auschwitz, men everywhere seek refuge in generalities, comfortable precisely because they are generalities. And such is the extent to which reality is shunned that no cries of protest are heard even when in the world community's own forum obscene comparisons are made between Israeli soldiers and Nazi murderers."<sup>14</sup>

But refusal to face honestly the reality of the Holocaust is not the beginning of the treason of the intellectuals and the moral cowardice of many churchmen. It simply exposes in extreme form the final consequences of an obsessive devotion to the dehumanized mechanical model, especially when applied to human experience and human commitments.

In his great classic, *The New Science of Politics*, Eric Voegelin showed how the flight from history has marked modern thought and brought it to internal bankruptcy and external subservience to the gods who rule over the spirit of the times. Internally, intellectual disciplines were corrupted as the quantitative and methodological triumphed over ultimate values:

As a consequence, all propositions concerning facts will be promoted to the dignity of science, regardless of their relevance, as long as they result from a correct use of method. Since the ocean of facts is infinite, a prodigious expansion of science in the sociological sense becomes possible . . .

Much deeper than by the easily recognized accumulation of trivialities has science been destroyed by the second manifestation of positivism, that is, by the operation on relevant materials under defective theoretical principles. Highly respectable scholars have invested an immense erudition into the digestion of historical materials, and their effort has gone largely to waste because their principle of selection and interpretation had no proper theoretical foundation but derived from the *Zeitgeist*, political preferences, or personal idiosyncrasies.<sup>15</sup>

He then went on to show how the mechanization, the abandonment of principles, the relativization of truth(s), worked out in practical politics:

The death of the spirit is the price of progress. Nietzsche revealed this mystery of the Western apocalypse when he announced that God was dead and that He had been murdered. This Gnostic murder is constantly committed by the men who sacrifice God to civilization.

Totalitarianism, defined as the existential rule of Gnostic activists, is the end form of progressive civilization.<sup>16</sup>

In a later work, Voegelin brilliantly demonstrated how Toynbee's great scheme of "history" represents in fact a flight from history into abstractions, and thereby utterly misconstrues the crucial biblical events which form the basis of biblical faith.<sup>17</sup> Toynbee's appraisal of the Jewish people and dislike of Israel, which have surprised and shocked some of his admirers, are but logically consistent outworkings of his speculative presuppositions.

Nazism was in no sense a revolt against "religion" and "spirituality." Neither was it "secularistic." Quite the contrary: in its central creed the party affirmed a devotion to *positives Christentum*. The *Führer* and other party orators made constant reference to "divine providence," "spiritual renewal," "moment of decision," "immortal destiny." "Christian front against materialism," and the like. Many of the party hymns were simply new words written to popular gospel songs, with the same brass bands marching and evoking from crowds the same emotional response. The key question, and here the issue

of "heresy" arises, is why the millions of baptized and confirmed Christians had no sense that they were now responding to visions and programs antithetical to biblical faith.

The answer is that most church leaders and theologians had already cast off any binding obedience to what the Bible teaches in stories and precepts and had relativized and adapted what they still retained to fit patriotic and ethnic claims. The common folk received little help from such leaders to distinguish between "religious devotion" and Christian faithfulness.

The net cast for the unwary was large. An early pamphlet by the Deputy *Führer* affirmed: "It is of course obvious that a party member and National Socialist would never describe himself as without faith since the National Socialist ideology presumes a religious attitude."<sup>18</sup> But what was the intellectual and confessional content of that "faith" and that "religious attitude"? As Hans Buchheim showed in his fine study of "religion" in the Third Reich, the unformed religious emotion might flow into any one of three great channels of popular religion—only one of which was vaguely Christian.<sup>19</sup>

The inner circle expressed the religious devotion that Hitler aroused in many of the faithful: "A star shines leading me from deep misery! I am his to the end. My last doubts have disappeared. Germany will live! *Heil Hitler!*"<sup>20</sup> Hitler's loyal churchmen responded in kind. A council of Lutheran leaders (including Werner Ehlert and Paul Althaus), meeting at Ansbach shortly after the Barmen Synod called the church to resistance to nazism, set forth their repudiation of Christian resistance and affirmation of accommodation:

... the unchangeable will of God meets us in the total reality of our life as it is illumined by God's revelation. It binds everyone . . . to the natural orders to which we are subject such as family, nation, race. . . . In this knowledge we thank God the Lord that he has given to our people in its need a Leader (Hitler) as a "pious and faithful sovereign."<sup>21</sup>

Barmen had shown Christianity and National Socialism to be irreconcilable; these churchmen were determined to accommodate a corrupted Christianity to nazism, and to do it in lan-

guage which sounded pious and traditional. The verbosity of the original German, with its prideful and rotund phrases, comes through even in translation.

Hitler and Bormann, for their part, intended the liquidation of the churches in due season.<sup>22</sup> Hitler's "table talk" and the hidden creed of the movement were explicit enough:

The more accurately we recognize and observe the law of nature and life . . . so much the more do we conform to the will of the Almighty. The more insight we have into the will of the Almighty the greater will be our successes. . . .

We shape the life of our people and our legislation according to the verdicts of genetics.<sup>23</sup>

No cross here, but a success story! No suffering servanthood here, but rather a vulgar social Darwinism.

The logic of *Mein Kampf* is theological,<sup>24</sup> and the central Antisemitism of nazism was far more revealing than ordinary race prejudice. What was at work in Christendom, in the heartland of the Reformation, was an ideology, a system, and ultimately a government which was in final rebellion against the Jewishness of holy history, against the God of the Bible, and against the people who signalized a system of being with which nazism was incompatible. The fact that the professors who tried so desperately to blend Christianity with nazism were fooled by individuals more cunning than they is really irrelevant. The importance of their statements and actions is that they show how generally indiscipline and heresy had penetrated the churches.

In *Politisches Christentum* (1935), Paul Althaus greeted Adolf Hitler as the promised *Wundermann*, like Alexander the Great an historical appearance who stands above the laws. In *Die Herrschaft Christi und die Herrschaft von Menschen* (1936), Werner Elert declared that a Christian always obeys the established authorities. As late as 1966 a third Erlangen Lutheran professor, Emanuel Hirsch, declared in *Ethos und Evangelium* that the work of the gospel is to deepen the existing human ethos. Examples of the philosophy of accommodation could be listed almost indefinitely, examples of the way in

which a relativized and emasculated "Christian" faith was put forward by churchmen. But the practice of promoting culture-religion and rejecting biblical counterculture did not begin at Erlangen, or in the Third Reich; it was well advanced and articulate during the German national revival following the Napoleonic wars.

Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher, prestigious Berlin preacher and teacher, wrote in the early nineteenth century that "Christianity stands, of course, in a special historical connection with Judaism, but as far as its historical existence and its aim are concerned, it is related to Judaism and paganism in the same way." This error, repeated hundreds of times in liberal Protestantism, has been dissected by a Danish Lutheran theologian, Kristen E. Skydsgaard, in a publication of the Lutheran World Federation. Professor Skydsgaard, thoroughly grounded in the theological and practical lessons of the Church Struggle with nazism, puts the matter this way:

Schleiermacher's view is posited on a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, a misunderstanding that has more than once been fatal for Protestant theology since Schleiermacher. Instead of seeing the relationship in terms of *Heilsgeschichte*, it is seen in terms of the psychology of religion. Forgotten was the fact that the God who spoke to and dealt with his people was the God and the father of Jesus Christ.

The fact was also overlooked that Israel continues to be the people of God, that God does not forget, even though his hand may be heavy upon them. Israel's life through the centuries and its continuing existence today is, in fact, a witness to God's hidden ways with his people.<sup>25</sup>

In short, Schleiermacher's bent toward general abstractions and universal principles made him forget the central story.

In the same volume a German Lutheran theologian shows how the historical perspectives have changed among those Christians who have begun to master the lessons of the Church Struggle and the Holocaust:

In the midst of the Christian West millions of Jews fell victim to a senseless and absurd post-Christian ideology; and in the midst of a

secularized world as a fruit of Zionism there has arisen in the "Holy Land" a State of Israel which is being reconstructed by Jews from all over the world, united by the language of the Bible. While this establishes for Israel a bit of earthly homeland, Christians are to a large extent being thrust back into their true and proper existence as "exiles of the dispersion" and "aliens" (I Peter 1:1, 2:11). They are learning what the Goluth has meant for the Jews through centuries.<sup>26</sup>

With what reluctance, however, do the churches encounter this reversal of roles! How fond they are of establishment, how suspicious they are of pilgrimage! And how vehemently do many churchmen defend "Christendom," for which there is no New Testament justification, while they attack "Ziondom" (that is, the state of Israel, for which the Bible provides whole chapters of affirmation)! "Oh, how heavy is the weight of nineteenth-century theological Liberalism upon us still!"<sup>27</sup>

In America, the last major intact bloc of nineteenth-century culture-religion still resists the call to counterculture and heartily affirms "the American way of life" (or sometimes "the Southern way of life"). And, although active political Antisemitism is largely confined to the Christian underworld, an endemic cultural Antisemitism weighs heavily upon the churches. The record of the *Christian Century*, the leading liberal Protestant journal, documents the point fully.<sup>28</sup> Over decades, and under every editor but Kyle Haselden and James Wall (the present incumbent), a veritable flood of editorials and articles has repeated all of the traditional cultural-Antisemitic<sup>29</sup> charges and demands against "the Jews":

the Jews must assimilate and become loyal members of American democratic society (9 June 1937, p. 735);

the Jews are warned that they cannot be protected from the consequences if they stubbornly insist on being different and separate (9 June 1937, p. 735);

international Jewish agencies are said to operate "outside the law of nations" (25 June 1947, p. 789);

Jewish "nationalism" was comparable to German nationalism, being based on the fallacy of "a privileged race" (9 June 1937, p. 736); the Jews are responsible for Antisemitism because of their "social

unassimilability" (24 September 1941, pp. 1167-69);  
 during the Third Reich, Jewish immigration to Palestine *and* to the  
 USA (even on temporary visas) was opposed (30 November 1938,  
 pp. 1456-58);  
 American Jews were charged with slighting America's interests by  
 promoting action against Hitler (18 June 1941, pp. 796-97);  
 the Jews were charged with false propaganda in reporting the Holo-  
 caust (9 December 1942, pp. 1518-19);  
 help was urged for *Christian* refugees (including converted Jews)  
 fleeing Nazi-controlled Europe, but not for Jews (1 March 1939,  
 pp. 270-72);  
 Christian churchmen favoring the opening of Palestine to Jewish  
 refugees from Hitler's Europe were attacked (20 December 1936,  
 pp. 1, 41-43);  
 the Jews should add Christian materials to their synagogue worship  
 (20 December 1939, pp. 1566-67);  
 President Truman's recognition of Israel was due to the Jewish vote  
 in New York City<sup>30</sup> (12 March 1947, p. 323; 26 May 1948, p. 500);  
 Israel is too much influenced by excessive Jewish orthodoxy (28  
 February 1951, p. 260);  
 Israel is a state without God (9 June 1948, p. 565).

And so on. Some of these criticisms of "the Jews" sound political rather than heretical; but they, and the editorial policy that featured them, derive uniformly from an unreflective cultural Antisemitism.

A review published in 1968 shows that neither the *Christian Century* nor liberal Protestantism generally has yet recognized the time of its visitation, and it can stand as a symbol of the continuing problem. The book was Arthur Hertzberg's *The French Enlightenment and the Jews* (1968), and the reviewer demanded that the Jews give up their separation and assimilate: "If this raises special problems in Judaism, the rest of us have also had to put aside ancestral traditions."<sup>31</sup> Precisely! To have faith is to remember, to recapitulate, to reenact. And the children of the Enlightenment—having abandoned any old-fashioned notions of the church as an "elect" or "separate" people, having gone over from the biblical view that history is carried by a chosen people to a general notion of social progress—cannot possibly understand the mystery of Jewish particularism

and universalism. They think that the problem is "the Jews," but the real problem is that they—baptized and abstractly Christian—have long since forgotten what a pilgrim church, a faithful people, is. Their heresy is less obvious than that of "Christian" movements and spokesmen in an advanced state of disintegration, for example, the "Aryan Christians" whom Bonhoeffer sought unsuccessfully to have condemned as heretical at the Faith and Order meeting in Fanø, Denmark (1934). But they are far more dangerous, for their slurring of the issues and the dignity of their ecclesiastical positions lead the Christian constituencies as a whole to accept teachings and countenance actions which are not only sub-Christian but anti-Christian.

### *Apostasy*

*Heresy* is teaching which claims to be Christian but is in fact contrary to biblical standards. *Apostasy* is the abandonment of loyalty to a community and its beliefs. In the Third Reich the slide into "Aryan" decrees and mass murder by Protestants and Roman Catholics was accepted by most adherents to Christianity. Preparation for the decline had been made by generations during which to think Christianly and to act accordingly had become confused, ambiguous concepts. The harvest of mass apostasy had been seeded by an essentially frivolous attitude to Christian teaching and discipline on the part of persons who broke their vows to "uphold the form of sound words and doctrine." It is true that each must finally answer personally for the condition of his own conscience. It is also true that when the flock drifts far astray and wanders into mortal danger the shepherds are uniquely guilty.

Was "the teaching of contempt" (Jules Isaac) "heretical"? However much we may today think it wrong, however strongly ecumenical councils and synods have subsequently spoken out, we Christians cannot claim that forty years ago the teaching of contempt was heretical. The most respected church fathers and the most authoritative synods had for centuries taught lies about the Jewish people and approved cruel and inhuman treatment of Jews. But such were wrong also before the Spirit

of Truth had led the churches to correct some points in their Antisemitism. The errors, sins, and guilt of Christendom cannot be denied truthfully. But during the Third Reich the teachings and practices went far beyond the theological Antisemitism of the educated and the cultural Antisemitism of both the educated and the masses of Christians. The definition of an "Aryan" Christianity was heretical. The establishment of "Aryan" congregations was heretical. Deference to political authority rather than obedience to the (admittedly imperfect) creeds and confessions was heretical.

To press the point, important as it is: war and the conduct of war have in recent times been condemned by church councils, but there is as yet no consensus as to when and where and under what circumstances the Christians must become conscientious objectors. Participation in war and the evils attendant on it cannot yet be termed heretical conduct. But justifying atrocities, justifying the killing of defective persons and the murder of socially or racially defined groups, is—even in a national emergency—heretical for Christians. Since the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials of Major War Criminals, and especially since the Convention of 1948, genocide has been a defined crime. Before that it was wrong, but it was not a crime. But excusing genocide, writing or speaking in support of it, was already, for Christians, heretical.

The problem was, and in most of Christendom yet remains, that under pressure and temptation most of the church leaders and the masses of the baptized will allow their thought and action to be controlled by the demands of "patriotism" and the nation-state rather than hold the line even where the churches have drawn it. And since governments of the modern type, including totalitarian states, rest upon a popular consensus, conflicts of loyalties arise which never existed in earlier centuries. Under earlier tribal dynasties, under kings who ruled "by divine right," no conflict of conscience arose for the ordinary Christian. The decisions were hammered out by the rulers of church and state, and the Christian's duty was loyal obedience. Today, since he participates to some degree in the political process and increasingly in the decision-making of the

churches, the layman is confronted from time to time by a conflict of collective opinions. Most commonly, the political collective justifies measures which are in principle—and sometimes explicitly—contrary to the *consensus fidelium*. And in such a season, few indeed held to the higher loyalty. The vast majority will follow the orders of the nation-state and be thankful that there is an ample supply of false prophets to tell them that to do so is also to obey the gods.

The characteristic marks of the modern age of Christendom are, therefore, the rise of totalitarian (“post-Christian”) ideologies; the mass apostasy of the gentiles (“Christians”); a sharp conflict between political rulers and that minority of baptized gentiles which strives to maintain a minimum Christian standard of conduct (“the Church Struggle”), with the political rulers supported by false prophets; the slaughter of those who by their very existence—and regardless of their personal opinions—signal the falsehood of the totalitarian visions, heroes, and history (“the Holocaust”). An uneasy peace between the superhuman state and the baptized is possible, on the other hand, because most of the Christians will obey men rather than God, will apostatize. And when the “Christians” show their true colors and go over to the Adversary, the Jews are left exposed as the one continuing counterculture which cannot assimilate, which cannot become good gentile heathen again.

Conditioned to flee from history, to avoid confrontation if at all possible, enlightened Christians have long preferred a spiritualized “Judaism” to having to deal with the Jewish people. The Christians have long since spiritualized “Christianity” and the Christian church to the point where few if any primary outward signs remain of what was once called to be “a peculiar people . . . Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God” (1 Peter 2:9–10). The advantage of a spiritualized, ethereal “church” is that adherents are then relieved of the burden of maintaining a counterculture; they can identify wholeheartedly with the prevailing social values, whatever they may be at a given time and place. That the Christian church has made great contributions in areas where old social orders are in dissolution—as in the tribal chaos of the Middle

Ages or in the recent collapse of tribalism and animism in Africa —is not disputed. But, with few exceptions, the churches have taken the path of accommodation and acculturation where confronted by powerful, intact social structures and value systems. And they have joined in the general resentment of the Jews, indeed blessed it, for persisting as a separate people and not assimilating too.

Culture-Christianity greatly prefers Jews who assimilate to Jews who remain Jews, precisely because Jews who persist in maintaining a counterculture are an unpleasant reminder that New Testament standards require Christians to be a counterculture too, separate from the age that is passing away. The contemporary gentile demand upon the Jews to settle for “Judaism” has been rightly dissected by a German scholar:

The treatment of the Jewish *people* as “religion” is in the verbal sense the spiritual murder of a “people,” genocide. The real connection between spiritualizing—pseudo-scientific theory and the practice of the murder of a “people” can be perceived readily enough. Only this time the theologians cannot hide themselves, as in the case of the Nazi genocide, behind the secularistic activists: This time they are quite directly involved with the potential murderers.

Now as earlier the people is spiritualized down to “a religion,” and thus this Christian spiritualizing has long served as a dependable instrument of Arab and European-American political propaganda by leftist intellectuals against Israel.<sup>32</sup>

Both Jews and Christians should know now that the Jewish people cannot blend, assimilate, and disappear into some gentile society or other, although in societies whose thought-structures are dominated by the Enlightenment (such as the USA and the USSR) individual Jews can do so. Even then it usually takes two or three generations for Jews to disengage from a tradition that goes back more than a hundred generations. In “enlightened” areas, all a Jew has to do to be homogenized is to cease to participate in the life of Israel. But when the violent and “post-Christian” systems emerge, even that option may be denied him; the determination to destroy a people and what they represent becomes a huge vacuum cleaner that sweeps up

even individual Jews who have become Antisemitic renegades, or converts to Christianity, or individualistic secular humanists. In the Third Reich, the Adversary demonstrated that Jewish peoplehood is neither "a religion" nor a "spiritual" concept; it is a concrete, specific, historical fact and force.

In the French Revolutionary Assembly, Clermont-Tonnerre pronounced the "line" which has dominated "enlightened" thinking ever since: "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a Nation, but must grant the Jews everything as individuals."<sup>33</sup> From Napoleon Bonaparte to Arnold J. Toynbee, from Hegel to Charles Clayton Morrison, this has been the cornerstone of modern cultural Antisemitism, just as the superseding myth is the cornerstone of theological Antisemitism. Both the "enlightened" intellectual line and the traditional theological line carry the genocidal message. In liberal Protestantism, with its combination of a residue of Christian teaching and enlightened individualism, both principles are at work: the Jew must convert, or in any case he must disappear. If he remains loyal to his fathers and fathers' fathers, if he stubbornly maintains in some fashion—and however loosely!—his relationship to the Jewish people, he is resented. But that resentment arises from an unsound political premise, combined with a false religious teaching. The Jews have been chosen, as the Christians have been called, to be "a people." And a just government, one that respects human liberty and dignity, will protect the rights and liberties of dissonant communities as well as dissenting individuals.

The meaning of the Holocaust for Christians is at least this: when the baptized betray their baptism, when those who have been grafted into history flee back out of history, when the "new men" and "new women" in Christ cast off the new life and become part of the dying age again, the "old Israel" is left alone as the sign that the God who is God yet rules and that—in spite of all world conquerors and posturing false prophets—his Kingdom shall triumph in the end. *For Christians only:* We must begin our agonizing self-assessment and reappraisal with the fact that in a season of betrayal and faithlessness the vast majority of the martyrs for the Lord of history were Jews. The

Jewish people carried history while the Christians fled headlong from their professed vocation.

The time of testing ended in death for six million Jews and apostasy by uncounted millions of Christians. The critical factor was the same in both cases: *peoplehood*. The Jews died because they were standing alone and not numbered among the nations of the earth. The Christians, with the exception of a minority of martyrs and confessors, betrayed the life into which they were called.

### NOTES

1. Richard L. Rubenstein, "Some Perspectives on Religious Faith after Auschwitz," in *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust*, ed. Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), pp. 260-62. For a fuller exposition of Rubenstein's theological reflections see *After Auschwitz* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966).

2. Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hassidim: the Early Masters* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), p. 4.

3. Johan M. Snoek, *The Grey Book* (New York: Humanities Press, 1970), p. 292.

4. Ariah L. Bauminger, *Roll of Honour* (Tel Aviv: "Hamanova" Publishing House, 1971), p. 38.

5. Willem A. Visser't Hooft, *Die Welt war meine Gemeinde* (Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1972), p. 500.

6. Cf. Appendix A, p. 000.

7. Address: Deposit, New York 13754.

8. Address: c/o National Conference of Christians and Jews, 43 West 57th Street, New York City 10019. For a review of these developments, see Franklin H. Littell, "Recent Jewish History: Lessons for Christians," in *Gratz College Annual*, 1 (Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 107-19.

9. Karl Barth, *Verheissung und Verantwortung der Christlichen Gemeinde im Leutigen Zeitgeschehen* (Zurich: Evang. Verlag, 1944), p. 16.

10. Karl Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 51.

11. Bishop Mugavero, in *Brothers in Hope*, ed. John M. Oesterreicher (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), p. 254. Apart from the most important question, raised in the text of this writing, the statement also misunderstands the nature of "secularism" and "secularization"; cf. Franklin H. Littell, "The Secular City and Christian Self-Restraint," in *The Church and the Body Politic* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), ch. 6. Further, the communities of faith have not been battered from outside by unbelievers; they have been battered by renegades and apostates, usually as much at home inside as outside.

12. Karl Kupisch, "Wider die Ächtung der Geschichte," in *Wider die Äch-*

*ung der Geschichte*, ed. Kurt Töpner (Munich: Bechtle Verlag, 1969), pp. 107-28.

13. Carl J. Friedrich, "Israel and the End of History," in *Israel: Its Role in Civilization*, ed. Moshe Davis (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956), p. 96.

14. Emil L. Fackenheim, "Jewish Faith and the Holocaust," *Commentary* (August 1968), vol. 46, pp. 30-36. "A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction."

15. Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 9.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 132.

17. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History, I: Israel and Revelation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), pp. 120 f.

18. Cited in John S. Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), p. 147.

19. Hans Buchheim, *Glaubenskrise im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1953), *passim*.

20. Helmut Heiber, ed., *The Early Goebbels Diaries* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 101.

21. Cited in Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 183.

22. Hermann Rauschning's books document how early and explicit was Hitler's contempt for Christianity, even though he continued to deceive and confuse the pious by his public posture. Cf. *The Revolution of Nihilism* (New York: Alliance Book Corp., 1939), pp. 118-19; *The Voice of Destruction* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), ch. 4. Bormann's plan for the Warthegau, personally approved by Hitler, programmed the privatization of Christianity and its eventual disappearance; Paul Gürtler, *Nationalsozialismus und evangelische Kirchen im Warthegau* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958).

23. Cited in Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958), pp. 346, 350. A popular SA song, which would lose its impact if translated, ran as follows:

*Papst und rabbi sollen weiden,  
Heiden woll'n wir wieder sein,  
Nicht mehr in die Kirche schleichen,  
Sonnenrad führt uns allein!*

In the revolt of the heathen gods with Nazi encouragement, Mithras received his due along with Wotan, Thor, Dionysius, Apollo, and Moloch! (The writer is grateful to Msgr. John M. Oesterreicher for this item.)

24. Michael D. Ryan, "Hitler's Challenge to the Churches: A Theological Political Analysis of *Mein Kampf*," in *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust*, p. 152 f.

25. K. E. Skydsgaard, "Israel, the Church and the Unity of the People of God," reprint from 10 *Lutheran World* (1963) 4 and 11 *Lutheran World* (1964) 3, pp. 2, 3.

26. Leonhard Goppelt, "Israel and the Church in Today's Discussion and in Paul," *ibid.*, p. 8.

27. Barth, *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day*, p. 83.

28. Hertzal Fishman, *American Protestantism and the Jewish State* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1973), *passim*.

29. The distinction between theological, cultural, and political Antisemitism is of fundamental importance. Theological Antisemitism developed in the church fathers along with the victory of Hellenistic thought and Roman law. Cultural Antisemitism was built into the language and images and instincts over centuries of "Christendom." Political Antisemitism is an ideological weapon, used by modern despotisms and totalitarian movements and regimes. A basic error of many studies of Antisemitism is that they confine use of the term to active and willful manifestations of the modern type, whereas the hidden, most deeply rooted and most dangerous sources of the evil are theological and/or cultural. See Franklin H. Littell, 1973 Israel Goldstein Lecture at Hebrew University, "Christendom, Holocaust and Israel: The importance for Christians of Recent Major Events in Jewish History," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (1973) 3:483-97.

30. After leaving the presidency, Harry Truman was awarded an honorary degree at Jewish Theological Seminary. The man who introduced him referred to him as a man who had contributed much to the birth of Israel. Mr. Truman responded: "... a man who contributed much? I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus!" God bless the Southern Baptist Sunday school that trained Harry Truman as a boy!

31. *Christian Century*, 28 October 1968, p. 253.

32. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, "Gottes Bundestreue und die biblischen Landverheissungen," in *Jüdische Hoffnungskraft und christlicher Glaube*, ed. Walter Strolz (Freiburg/Br.: Herder Verlag, 1971), pp. 129-30.

33. Quoted in H. G. Adler, *The Jews in Germany: From the Enlightenment to National Socialism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), p. 3.