

Why should the Holocaust
be remembered
and therefore taught?

by

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Between 10 and 17 July 1988, REMEMBERING FOR THE FUTURE, an international conference, will take place in Oxford and in London on the subject of the Holocaust.

Its aims will be as follows:

- 1) to bring together people from a number of countries who have been worried for a long time about the problems raised by the Holocaust and have been studying and giving it a lot of thought, in order to enhance international cooperation and collaboration in this all-important work;
- 2) to share with the public questions concerning the implications of the Holocaust for every one of us in our time and for the future;
- 3) to ensure a place for the teaching of the Holocaust in the schools, universities and theological colleges in order to develop a general awareness;
- 4) to raise the fundamental and disturbing question of how such mass slaughter could happen in the heart of what is referred to as Christian Europe. Since Christianity is preaching a gospel of love, how could millions of Christians stand by or participate;
- 5) to learn to detect danger signs which signal the take-over of power by demagogues who play on people's fears to turn one group into a scapegoat, thus making it vulnerable to attack;
- 6) to fight disinformation and falsification of history and positively to promote the publication and dissemination of the oral and written testimonies of witnesses of Nazi crimes who very soon will no longer be among the living;
- 7) to create a climate of understanding and trust in which members of all faiths, animated by mutual respect and a desire to build a peaceful future, can discuss their respective beliefs and learn about each other's traditions.

In brief, we believe that it is vital for our own salvation to teach the Holocaust and its impact by all the means at our disposal.

Why should the Holocaust be remembered and therefore taught?

*Lecture delivered by Dr Elisabeth Maxwell at Yarnton Manor
on 17th March 1988*

When I consider the eminent scholars and specialists who have preceded me in this room, I feel very humble indeed. My credentials of scholarship do not match those of Geza Vermes or Bill Simpson or Yehuda Bauer. I am simply an enlightened lay person who entered the realm of the Holocaust by marrying a Jew most of whose family were murdered in Auschwitz. Once our own large family was brought up, I was able to take up studying again and read extensively about the Holocaust, attended lectures and private teachings, and emerged a changed person. I have remained obsessed with it ever since.

As Wiesel said in an interview: 'Call it passion, fervour, obsession but we are all obsessed. That is the special impact that this world—the world of Auschwitz—has on us. And all of us who lived it through or those who deal with it: as scholars, as writers, as commentators. Once you enter it you are obsessed; you are no longer the same person. You are inhabited by its fire. ... You don't enter that world with impunity.'¹

I wish to stress at the outset that the remarks I will make this evening are not original. I have relied on writings from my mentors, Franklin Littell, Roy and Alice Eckardt, Yehuda Bauer, Elie Wiesel, Emil Fackenheim, and many fellow-researchers, scholars and teachers across the world. I have quoted from them, consistently and unashamedly, and have listed all my sources for those wishing to return to the original writings.

My own standpoint is that of a person brought up in the strict observance of the Christian French Protestant faith, but whose outlook has been considerably altered by two major factors: by the event of the Holocaust itself, and by study of the Jewish faith and traditions as they have evolved in parallel to Christianity over the last 1900 years.

The answers to the question, 'Why should the Holocaust be remembered and therefore taught?', are many and varied, but I shall limit myself to the

basic reasons that prompted the REMEMBERING FOR THE FUTURE committee to decide that such a conference should be held now and in this country.

Many people say, 'Why should you wish to remember this ghastly, morbid event?' 'What is it to me?', they say, 'I was not born.' Or, 'I was young; it has nothing to do with me. I don't hate Jews, my best friend is a Jew, but it's best forgotten.' It is true that we do not like to be reminded of horrible deeds that make us shudder. The degradation of the victims by the perpetrators is unpalatable and shameful. We infinitely prefer to forget and carry on living as if nothing had happened.

As the Chief Rabbi, Lord Jakobovits, briefly remarked in his lecture in Jerusalem on religious responses to the Holocaust, some questions raised by it will defy our understanding, let alone rational interpretation, until the end of time.²

Remembrance of the Holocaust is threatened firstly by Revisionism, disinformation, even negation; secondly, by trivialisation of the event and by the argument that it is not unique or specific; and thirdly, by insistence that it should be put behind us and forgotten as a temporary aberration.

On the contrary, we must talk about the Holocaust because it is a watershed event, because it pertains to the universal conscience in that it reveals a depth of unbelievable perversity in man. It is everybody's problem. It has shown the Christian faith to be at an impasse and thus calls on all Christians to re-examine their religion in relation to Judaism. We will therefore need to discuss the role of Christianity in the collective consciousness which made the Holocaust possible.

As human beings we have a propensity with time to forget the bad and remember the good things of life. In normal day-to-day living this is an asset because it allows one to forgive more easily, not to harbour resentment against one's neighbours for misdeeds. It enables us to live alongside death and reconcile ourselves with the tragedies of life which burden each and every one of us. It allows us to go forward and grasp the joyful events and remember them better, so that at the end of our lives, the good periods seem to predominate whilst the darker side of life recedes further into the past.

However, if we do not remember the transgressions for which we are responsible, if we have no regrets for those actions which are shameful and no desire to make amends and to learn from our mistakes, then there is no way we can correct ourselves and become better human beings. Therein lies the importance of remembering such horrendous crimes against humanity.

If we do not acquaint ourselves with what truly happened, if we refuse to see where our own responsibility lies, there is no hope for the future, and

every chance, on the contrary, that it can happen again. Genocides have occurred since the Holocaust, for instance, in Cambodia under Pol Pot, but apart from feeble protestations, the world did not lift a finger.

Nowadays, when entire television programmes are made to shock the world about the actions of Israeli soldiers in the occupied territories, or terrorist killings in Northern Ireland, it is worth asking what happened in the world when six million Jews were murdered. At that time the world did not seem to have a conscience. We should be reminded of that.

There are many ways in which we can keep alive the memory of such a past, but no better way than through teaching history with utter integrity. If we do not instruct the coming generations in what has happened, how can they possibly understand why they should be concerned?

If we do not meticulously preserve the recollections, both written and oral, of those few thousand survivors who suffered in the concentration camps and ghettos, or accomplished extraordinary escapes, we are not doing our duty towards the collective memory.

This is why one of the essential undertakings of the forthcoming conference is to bring to the public an awareness of all the problems still unsolved, all the research that is being undertaken, all the findings that are still emerging and all the unbelievable disinformation which is taking place all over Europe, the Middle East, the USA and even Asia.

I The Holocaust is a specific event and a unique event

Lord Jakobovits states that Holocaust theology has become a major academic discipline, perhaps more extensive and certainly more popular than Jewish theology as such has ever been. Indeed, discussion of the whole of this new research into the concepts of the Divine among humans grew up in response to the questions: 'Where was God at Auschwitz?' and 'How can we relate to him after the awesome desolation!' ³

I totally accept the Chief Rabbi's point of view that the relationship of the Jews to God remains unchanged after the Holocaust as so many writings of the Holocaust prove. One which I find most moving is Zvi Kolitz's reconstruction of the last thoughts of a pious Jew called Yossel Rakover, murdered by the Nazis. Rakover addresses God:

You may insult me, you may castigate me, you may take from me all that I cherish and hold dear in the world, you may torture me to death—I shall believe in you, I shall love you no matter what you do to test me! And these are my last words to you, my wrathful God: nothing will avail you in the least.

You have done everything to make me renounce you, to make me lose my faith in you, but I die exactly as I have lived, a believer!

Eternally praised be the God of the dead, the God of vengeance, of truth and of law, who will soon show his face to the world again and shake its foundations with his almighty voice.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.

Into your hands, O Lord, I consign my soul.⁴

I cannot substantiate or oppose the statement of the uniqueness of the Holocaust from a Jewish religious point of view as did the Chief Rabbi in his lecture since I am not qualified to discuss Jewish responses. But I share the views of Robert McAfee Brown who writes:

The Holocaust was not simply one further instance of the enormity of evil, but an event absolutely without parallel, since Jews were killed not for doing what they did but for being who they were. Their 'crime', punishable by death, was having the wrong religious grandparent.⁵

The extermination of the Jews was necessary to accomplish Hitler's racial ideology of the supremacy of the Aryan race. The world of the Holocaust was not of our world, it had its own symbolic, coded and euphemistic language created by the Nazis, it was the 'Special Treatment' of the Jewish problem. The deportees were transported and gassed without believing it was occurring because of the continued acts of deception staged for them and for the world. This absence of knowledge is at the heart of what happened and the problem that is posed to historians. The extermination was a most degrading and debasing process. It was this singular determination to treat Jews in their lifetime as worthless refuse which rendered their death even more miserable.

A survivor of Auschwitz described this 'other world' at Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem:

The time there was not a concept as it is here on our planet. Every fraction of a second passed there was at a different rate of time. And the inhabitants of that planet had no names. They had no parents and they had no children. They were not clothed as we are clothed here. They were not born there and they did not conceive there. They breathed and lived according to different laws of Nature. They did not live according to the laws of this world of ours, and they did not die.⁶

While even the worst society is geared to life, the Holocaust Kingdom was geared to death. It would be quite wrong to say that it was merely a means, however depraved, to an end somehow bound up with life. As an enterprise

subversing the Nazi war effort, the murder camps were total failures, for the human and material 'investment' far exceeded the 'produce' of fertilizer, gold teeth and soap. The Holocaust Kingdom was an end in itself, having only one ultimate 'product', and that was death.⁷

This elimination of the Jews is totally documented. Numerous books have been written on the subject by very serious historians who have researched official papers, computed figures and related the sorry tale of trials and death camps.

It is a historical distortion to say that the treatment of Jews was motivated by their own bellicose attitude and therefore justified. Hitlerite dogma instigated the extermination; it may have happened during the war but it is not a war phenomenon.

It is our sacred duty as teachers to amass stark facts, to read and publish diaries and survivors' accounts, to interest ourselves in details concerning the death of the Jews.

If we are not there to collect the last possible witness's testimony, there will be no memory and it will be like a second death. History itself is made of an amalgam of testimonies from victims, from survivors and from perpetrators. The historians just put that onto cards and computers. But survivors like Simone Veil wish to say more than appears on the historians' cards. Memory is for her an obsession. It is the obsession of a survivor who cannot tell what she saw because no-one really wishes to hear. She explains that when they arrived at Auschwitz they numbered 15,000, and the next day, when they had been tattooed and were smelling the burnt flesh in the smoke rising from the chimneys, they realised that they were no longer the 15,000 people who had started out. Then they saw heaps of shoes, clothing, spectacles, prams, toys. 'Where were all the people to whom these things belonged? We could see trainloads coming in. We could see people getting out, going into buildings and never coming out.'

It is a source of unbearable suffering to her now that people want to deny that all this happened or that nobody wants to listen to details. The message does not get through. My listeners are completely indifferent, she says. They speak about something else among themselves as if I was not there.

In his book *If This is a Man*, Primo Levi writes in detail of each individual suffering. He thinks that we must remember the intricate details—details of hunger, of the control of lice, of the Kapo who has punched his victim on the nose and then sent him to wash because he is dirty. These very details describe the extent of their deprivations, for they

were bereft of everything—their clothes, their shoes, even of their hair and finally of their name.

Details also matter a great deal to Lanzmann. In his film *Shoah*, addressing contemporary witnesses, he asks if they remember when the Jews were locked up in the church, what time it was when they were taken away in lorries? How did it happen? How many carriages? How long did it take to go from the ramp to the gas chambers? How long before the carriage came back empty? Exactly here? And so on.

What remains is what witnesses have not been able to tell. What remains defies description and is impossible to express in human terms. That which does not let itself be shortened, summed up or explained. 'Hier ist kein warum', said a Kapo to Primo Levi who was being tortured.⁸

Stark facts are what historians and scholars are collecting in order that it shall be remembered.

In Radzimin there lived a Hasid by the name of Rabbi Yitzhak Meir Kaminer ... [There follows a complicated account of typical Nazi ways of singling out a helpless Jew for humiliation and torture.] Then they forced him to dress in his Steimel, Tallith and T'fillin, took him to the town square, stood him against the Christian cross, and ordered him to kiss it. When Kaminer refused to obey them, one of the policemen threatened they would not simply shoot him but rather beat him to death. Kaminer remained unmoved. Then they fell upon him like wild beasts, and beat him senseless until they thought he was dead.

After the policemen were through with him and had left, several Jews ran towards Kaminer who was lying on the ground, and lo, he was still barely alive. They carried him to his apartment, rushed for a doctor, and he managed to bring him back to life. He later perished in Auschwitz.⁹

There are six million stories like this one but we will never know them all; they were lost in the pits of Russia and Poland and in the smoke from the crematoria.

II Disinformation and rewriting history

Only by consigning details to memory will we not forget the stern imperative on the monument at Treblinka: Never Again. Or as the Baal Shem Tov said in words inscribed at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem: 'To forget is to prolong the exile and to remember is the beginning of redemption.'

But if we do not remember accurately, then we will yield to a type of

remembering that tells us to forget, that says it never happened, that it was a hoax, that it was a plot orchestrated by Jews to gain world sympathy for the State of Israel. Hannah Arendt spoke of the banality of evil. The uncanny truth is that evil becomes trivial. The incredible paradox is that the final horror fails to move us; worse than that, it is nothing at all.

These assertions feed on the implicit antisemitism always lurking just below the surface, and in the insecurity of those who want very much to believe there never was a Holocaust. For if there never was a Holocaust, then we are not so bad after all. It is well-known that neo-Nazism has been spreading within West Germany. Scores of informants in that country have emphasised that a latent, fearsome anti-Jewish feeling tends to exist there. Norbert Kampe examines the various guises in which disinformation appears:

These new 'revisionists' do not question the irrefutable evidence. Instead, they are attempting with the aid of comparative historical analysis to trivialize the Holocaust—in short, to make it appear 'normal'. Is it necessary to revise the previously valid notion of the singularity and unparalleled monstrosity of state-organized genocide? Is genocide rather not a universal, historical, anthropological constant? Was 'Auschwitz' merely the replication of the Bolshevik 'Gulag'? In fact, could one not argue that the 'Gulag' was the causal prerequisite of 'Auschwitz'? Did the Nazis not act in apparent or genuine self-defence? Was Hitler indeed not justified in deporting the Jews? Is it not necessary today for a German to identify with the courageous defensive struggle of the soldiers on the collapsing Eastern front in 1944/5—even if it meant the continued operation of the death camps? Was the resistance of July 20, 1944, instead of being heroic, irresponsible? Is there cause more than forty years after the end of the war for Germany in its self-image and in its presentation of foreign policy to feel constraint? Hasn't this constraint up to now been exploited by the persecuted and their descendants for their own advantage, as well as abused by the left (since the days of student protest in 1968), in order to destabilize the Federal Republic? Isn't it time for the Federal Republic to free itself of historical ballast—in short, to conduct offensive policies which are commensurate with its position as an economic and military middle power?¹⁰

It is not only in Germany that such perverse insults are being peddled around. This country which prides itself on its fairness allows a paper published by the National Front to affirm that most of these six million Jews never perished at all but returned to their families and are now in the USA and that the crematoria existed for no more sinister purpose than hygienic reasons.¹¹

Legal steps should be taken against such subversive disinformation, comments Elie Wiesel, as has been done in Germany.

Governments should adopt laws. I, for instance (but I'm not a lawyer), I would like to see some legal steps taken against those who deny that the death camps existed. But of course I know the problems—the First Amendment, the freedom of expression. But I would like to see that. After all, what they say is that I am a liar and that all those who wrote books about their experiences, all the survivors, are liars.¹²

Genocide is never far away from such excess:

About 7,000 members of a white Neo-Nazi extra-parliamentary group, waving swastika-like flags called for a separate state for Afrikaner whites in South Africa ... in which blacks would be allowed only as far as their labour was needed and Jews would be expelled ... The leader, Mr Eugene Terreblanche proclaimed: We will govern ourselves with our superior white genes. He was surrounded by khaki-clad bodyguards carrying rubber truncheons and holstered pistols ...¹³

The only way to fight disinformation is to educate. One way is to challenge the universities and institutions of higher education in Great Britain to rethink the relation of humanist values to technology by raising the question of moral ethics in teaching.

Germany at the time of the Holocaust was the most technologically advanced nation in Europe. Yet at the Wannsee conference of 20 January 1942, of the fourteen representatives from the Reich departments who answered Reinhard Heydrich's call to discuss the efficient murder of the Jews, seven had doctors' degrees.

Administration followed suit everywhere.

Listen to the tangled story of the Holocaust as seen from the Allied point of view. First: the response of the British Foreign Office. Viewed from the lofty heights of Whitehall, the suffering of the Jews counted for little against the mounting slaughter of world-wide war.

Why should the Jews be spared distress and humiliation when they have earned it? reads one minute. And another: 'In my opinion, a disproportionate amount of the time of the Office is wasted on dealing with these wailing Jews.' And another: 'What is disturbing is the apparent readiness of the new Colonial Secretary to take Jewish Agency "sob-stuff" at its face value.'¹⁴

The laws must protect loyal opposition. Medical societies and law societies must accept the self-discipline of maintaining moral ethics. It is unbelievable, for example, that a man like Mengele was let loose to proceed

with his pseudo-medical experiments, after having sworn the Hippocratic oath. Universities should be able to revoke degrees, as well as give them. There is no reason why the government alone is expected to enforce laws. Why not the institutions themselves?

There is a need to make awareness of the Holocaust and its implications part of the curriculum of all applied sciences: law, medicine, architecture, economics, engineering, computer information, statistics, public administration, education. It is well-known that there was not one profession in Nazi Germany which did not suffer a breakdown of professional morality and integrity. No engineering students will learn about the collaboration of engineers with the Nazi regime unless they are specifically taught this.

In most universities here in the UK, general interest in and knowledge of the Holocaust, of antisemitism and neo-Nazism, is low and unlikely to change of its own accord. It is therefore incumbent upon survivors and educators, Jews and Christians alike, to create captive audiences and to teach professional responsibility; it cannot be relegated to elective courses or departments of religion, history or philosophy. Teaching of the collaboration of German Nazi professors in the Final Solution should become a part of the standard curriculum of these disciplines and the Holocaust curriculum must be integrated into existing compulsory courses.

Accounts of sadism are commonplace in a post-Nazi world. What is not, is a sustained and careful analysis of the banality of evil. Misinformation and disinformation take many forms.

The Germans, for instance, tend to rewrite history. One of their current attitudes, emanating even from respected scholars, is to compare the politics of the Nazis with those of Stalin and ask, 'What was different? This is what happens when you have totalitarian regimes.'

Did not the Gulag Archipelago serve as the model for Auschwitz? Was not the 'class murder' practised by the Bolsheviks the logical and factual prototype of the 'racial murder' of the National Socialists? Can Hitler's most secret actions also be explained by his inability to forget the 'rat cage'? Did not Auschwitz perhaps in its origins emanate from a past which did not want to go away?¹⁵

But there are major differences between these two crimes and they cannot truly be compared nor can one exonerate the other. Another tendency is to rewrite history, falsify figures, to invent dates, to continue the euphemistic use of words coined by the Nazis and generally to diminish their responsibility wherever possible.

The French, on the other hand, are less subtle. They have extremists who simply and fully deny that the crematoria ever existed for any other purpose than the decent burial of those who actually died. Some people have written doctoral theses to the effect that there was no extermination policy and if a few thousand people here and there died, that was the result of nations at war.¹⁶

Other countries, like Russia, describe the Holocaust as part of the general Jewish conspiracy to establish Zionism and a State of Israel. They affirm that the Jews themselves participated in the murder of their own people in order to arouse the pity of the rest of the world in their bid to acquire a chunk of Palestine. The Arabs are only too pleased to go along with this and embroider on it. A new form of disinformation has now appeared in Japan of all places, where hundreds of thousands of books have been printed denouncing the capitalist and economic hold of the Jews on the world's economy and making them the scapegoats for any financial difficulties.

In the past, the Poles allowed an ambiguity between Poles and Jewish Poles to obscure the fact that the three million Polish Jews who perished were exterminated because they were Jews and not because they were Poles. Although one acknowledges the martyrdom of Poland, it is playing into the hands of disinformation not to report the facts accurately. I have just returned from Poland and am satisfied that very serious and trustworthy studies are now being carried out by the Polish Academy of Science, the Institute of Jewish Studies and the Commission for the Study of Nazi Crimes at the Ministry of Justice. I was given an excellent factual book on Auschwitz, published by the department in question. I was also given all facilities by the Polish Government concerning information I required for the Conference REMEMBERING FOR THE FUTURE. Polish scholars will be attending and participating in the scholarly conference and the Auschwitz museum is contributing unique drawings to the Art Exhibition.

We must therefore work incessantly through colloquia, conferences, public papers, public reviews and public books to saturate the market with the truth, and we must enlist the help of the media in spreading this truth. Disinformation and distortion of history can only be fought in one way, and that is by education, by publication of facts and figures.

Through our awareness of the reasons why these crimes happened, we must watch for early signs of genocide. For when we study what has happened, what do we see? We see that all the institutions of learning, one by one, gave in to the new ideology without any resistance at all. The

universities, the legal profession, the medical institutions, the religious institutions. The elite of the country lost their moral ethics. The doctors turned butchers and experimenters, lawyers turned prosecutors and hangmen, the universities taught a new ideology and hatred, and the churches taught contempt and in some cases even tried to deny that Christ was a Jew.

These are some of the points to which we must direct our vigilance and these are the issues that the papers of the conference will be discussing.

I have so far sought to demonstrate how the abysmal failure of the elite aided and abetted the working of the infernal death industry. I have insisted that the collective memory must remember the Holocaust, and remember it accurately. I am now coming to the crucial third part of my lecture.

III The fundamental question is: *How was this all made possible and what role did Christianity play?*

In order to begin to explore these issues, we have to return to the roots of the various problems. At the time of the Holocaust did people know? What did they know? Why did they not believe? Why did they not act?

We know that foreign governments were aware of what was happening. This has been abundantly proved. So did international organisations, such as the Red Cross. The Vatican knew; the German Church knew. What is certain is that the incredible tales of events barely stirred anyone's conscience.

All this blindness to the fate of the Jews seems to have resulted from a theological history which was seriously warped, in which the most common thought at the time was the complete rejection of the Jewish people and the transfer of their mission to the Christian people. Therefore the existence of the Jews became incomprehensible and abnormal and Judaism remained outside Christianity until Vatican II (1961–1965).

Once this antisemitism was established, 'there was an inevitable progression from verbal aggression to violence from rumour to riot, from gossip to genocide'.

Six million Jews, sacrificed by the gentile world, lived and died in a massive experience of abandonment from 1941 to 1945. This was an historical event.¹⁷

The collective history of the human conscience nurtured by a long history of antisemitism can be the only explanation for the dearth of teaching of the Christian people—and worse still for their immense silence and complicity with the perpetrators. The most serious consequence of this

collective consciousness is the deep link between Christian anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism.

Alice Eckardt, for whose teaching I shall always be grateful, poses the questions:

—How are we to understand a German cardinal's letter sent to his clergy following the November 1938 Kristallnacht telling them that this nationwide attack on Jewish places of worship, businesses, homes and persons was *not* a matter for church or clerical concern?

—How are we to grasp the fact that in the years between 1939 and 1945 the only two references made to Jews by the Jesuit periodical *Civiltà Cattolica* (published in the Vatican) were in denunciatory ways in connection with the trial and crucifixion of Jesus? Moreover, those denunciations were not restricted to the past, but were brought up to date. So in December 1941 we read: 'the crime of the sons of the Synagogue has been repeated in every generation'. And again in March 1942: those who were filled with 'malice' and 'furious hatred' toward Jesus and who were responsible for his crucifixion are clearly identified in the Gospels and 'remain under the open accusation in front of the whole universe, even today'.

—How are we to accept that the best that Pastor Martin Niemöller was able to say regarding the 'alien and uncongenial' Jews was a grudging acknowledgement that 'God had seen fit to reveal Himself in the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth' and therefore this 'painful and grievous stumbling block has to be accepted for the sake of the Gospel'?

—How are we to deal with the reality that on each 28 December during WWII Christians were able 'to continue blithely commemorating the death of the Holy Innocents at Bethlehem, while showing such little concern, even after the news had reached them, that millions of other innocents were being done to death by a modern Herod at Belsen and Auschwitz'?

—And when a rabbi went to a local priest to plead for his intercession with the authorities to stop the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz, or at least to do something to save the innocent children, the cleric's response was: there are no innocent Jewish children. You are all guilty of the Lord's death, and unless you confess this and enter the church, you will suffer these punishments deservedly. How can we live with this knowledge?¹⁸

There is little doubt that with rare exceptions, and here Dietrich Bonhoeffer comes immediately to mind, the Church in Germany was inactive or actively helping the Nazis. As Alice Eckardt continues:

When millions of European Christians had the opportunity to suffer for Christ and the faith during the Hitler years, few accepted the challenge.¹⁹

These examples of Christian responses to the Holocaust in its various stages reveal the logic of the church's preponderant theology—a theology based on the conviction that a sterile and perverse Judaism had been replaced by the Christian Church as the carrier of God's Word and Authority, that Jews were an evil people guilty of killing both God's prophets and Himself in His human incarnation, and thus bearing God's curse until they accepted the only means of salvation open to humankind: Jesus Christ. Such a theology placed Jews outside the universe of concern.²⁰

For Paul Van Buren, the Protestant thinker, antisemitism started with two main facts: (i) the origin of the deicide calumny and its misuse; (ii) the displacement theory, i.e. that the Christian Church has displaced the people of Israel and the new covenant has displaced the old.

Franklin Littell, United Methodist historian and Churchman and one of my mentors, reinforces the above point:

The cornerstone of Christian Antisemitism is the superseding or displacement myth, which already rings with the genocidal note. This is the myth that the mission of the Jewish people was finished with the coming of Jesus Christ, that 'the old Israel' was written off with the appearance of 'the new Israel'. To teach that a people's mission in God's providence is finished, that they have been relegated to the limbo of history, has murderous implications which murderers will in time spell out. The murder of six million Jews by baptized Christians, from whom membership in good standing was not (and has not been) withdrawn, raises the most insistent questions about the credibility of Christianity. The existence of a restored Israel, proof positive that the Jewish people is not annihilated, assimilated, or otherwise withering away, is substantial refutation of the traditional Christian myth about their end in the historic process. And this is precisely why Israel is a challenge, a crisis for much contemporary Christian theology.²¹

What is needed is to fight the Church's credibility crisis. The teaching and preaching of churches should be fundamentally changed from what has been said for centuries. Littell insists that we must institute a study process to educate Christians, give them guidance and affirm the right of the laity to information about current thinking and progress. In a recent talk with me, he said: 'Such changes must not be dismissed lightly and we urge that questions of such weight should be discussed at the highest level. Teaching in the past has contained implications of genocide and demonstrates that it is possible on a mass scale. Anyone who has self-respect and is not content to flow with the current is involved and should speak out.'

Roy Eckardt, the well known American Protestant theologian, said to

me in a recent conversation: 'The Holocaust is unique. The shock of it has made Christianity arrive at the fact that it has to deal with the matter. Decent people such as James Parkes, Bill Simpson did not need the Holocaust to apprehend Christian antisemitism but their voice was not heard. The Holocaust came as a trigger and perhaps Christian thinking was in need, alas, of that kind of trauma. Amongst the statements that one can make is that Christianity cannot be referred about any longer as the replacement of Judaism because Judaism remains after Christianity has happened. This is the central issue for Christians because their very integrity is at stake. The problem is to reconcile their claim with reality.'

For the Catholic side, Cardinal Roger Etchegaray defines the mission of reconciliation and reminds us of our privileged relationship with Judaism, citing Romans 11:18, 'Boast not ... for thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.'

The perennity of the Jewish people is a problem for the Church, not only on account of the improvement of external relations but as an inward problem which affects its own definition. As in the parable, we are reminded of the two sons who cannot snatch the totality of the inheritance. Each is for the other without jealousy ... there exists a demanding emulation between the one who is waiting for a Messiah to come and the one who is waiting for His return.

Such perspectives are as yet unfamiliar to Christian mentality but this is where progress is to be made if the Christian/Jewish dialogue is not to remain superficial and full of mental restrictions. As long as Judaism remains outside the history of our salvation, we will be at the mercy of antisemitic reflexes.

After having defined how far our mission of reconciliation should go with the Jewish people, we must take seriously our mission of penitence and repentance for our centuries-long attitude vis-à-vis Judaism. Let us ask forgiveness from our Lord and from our Jewish brethren for having so often suffered at our hands from the teaching of contempt and for having perished through the horror of the Holocaust.²²

It should not have required the methodical murder of six million people, including one and a half million children under fourteen years of age, to awaken individual Christians or theologians or the churches collectively to the necessity of such revision. It was however the shock of the Holocaust which finally forced the Vatican into re-examining the position of the Church vis-à-vis Judaism. Franklin Littell writes:

From the initiative of Pope John XXIII a number of signals were given that purged the Roman Catholic liturgy of the teaching of contempt. Out of Vatican II came *Nostra Aetate*, with its Section 4 especially important in

correcting some major pillars of traditional Christian antisemitism. From 1965 to the 'Guidelines and Suggestions' of 1975 and the 'Notes for Preaching and Catechism' of 1985, there is a steady progression towards fraternity. Perhaps equally important, certainly in mobilizing activists in the cause of Christian/Jewish dialogue, has been the review and improvement of Roman Catholic catechetical materials by special self-study committees in a number of countries.²³

Rubenstein and Roth in their *Approaches to Auschwitz* acknowledge that:

Slowly and painfully, Christians are now discovering the Holocaust impact on their tradition with the American thinkers now in the vanguard. A movement is now underway to go beyond appraisal of Church life in the Third Reich and enquiry about Christian roots and antisemitism toward substantial theological revision. Christian writers such as Robert McAfee Brown, Harry James Cargas, A. Roy and Alice Eckardt, Eva Fleishner, Franklin Littell, John T. Pawlikowski and John K. Roth are contributing to this process.²⁴

Paul van Buren writes: 'Having begun by taking Jews into account in a way not known before in the history of Christianity, at least a few Christians have begun to realize that a reconsideration of what Christians have been saying about Judaism and of Christian-Jewish relations must lead to a reconsideration of Christianity itself ... Theology can shut its eyes and pretend that the Holocaust never happened and that Israel doesn't exist. Theology has shown itself capable of such blindness before! But if there are prospects for serious theology, for a theology not hopelessly blind to matters that pertain to the heart of its task, then the time has come for a reconsideration of the whole theological and Christian enterprise of the most radical sort.'²⁵

Perhaps Alice Eckardt best sums up this idea when she says that the Church needs to put an end to all teachings of superiority and claims to exclusive possession of the means of salvation.

... We must therefore rid ourselves of the arrogant assumption that *we* understand God's will while *they*, Jews, do not. This requires very specifically rejecting on *principle* all missionary efforts directed to Jews ... (I say this with pain because I know that people involved in missions to the Jews often sought to help them; and many still working for conversion do so out of love. Still, I will never forget the anguished and angry cry of a survivor: 'Keep your hands off our children! We didn't survive Hitler's ovens to lose them to the missionaries!')

... If the Jewish people are not the elder brothers within the family of God, it follows that the Gentiles, as reputedly adopted younger brothers, actually

remain outside and without hope.

It is ironic, but also a tribute to the courage and temerity of Jews, that they, the chosen and innocent victims of Hitler's murderous plan, have been the first to raise the most audacious questions; while Christians, who at least must be listed among the accomplices or bystanders, have remained complacent and silent—as if the abyss had not opened beneath them. We in the Christian community are beginning to discover that we have much to learn from Jews—those very people our tradition labelled as blind, 'fossilized' or demonic.²⁶

Until Christian theologians are ready to create a theology free of any anti-Jewish proclivities, the Church will remain in the impossible situation it has always been in of providing the theological and liturgical foundation for that very antipathy that can break out in antisemitic violence.

The most hopeful statement, and most comprehensive and courageous, was made in January 1980, and after five years of intense study, by the Protestant Church of the Rhineland, in which the Synod of the church adopted by an overwhelming majority the *Declaration on Renovating the Relationship between Christians and Jews*. This statement, the most advanced yet from any Christian church, states that the *Declaration* is brought about by four factors:

- (a) The recognition of Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust—the defamation, persecution and murder of Jews in the Third Reich.
- (b) The new biblical insights concerning the continuing significance of the Jewish people for salvation history (e.g. Rom. 9–11), which have been attained in connection with the Church Struggle.
- (c) The insight that the continuing existence of the Jewish people, its return to the Land of Promise, and also the creation of the State of Israel are signs of the faithfulness of God towards God's people (cf. the study 'Christians and Jews' III, 3).
- (d) The readiness of Jews, in spite of the Holocaust, to engage in common study and cooperation.²⁷

I would like to conclude with a reference by Geza Vermes to a one-article counsel of behaviour, given by Jesus, in which He explicitly prescribes the single duty: 'Whatever you wish that men should do to you, do so to them, and Matthew added: "For this is the Law and the Prophets".' Vermes further points to a similar statement accredited to the great Hillel, who may have been still alive when Jesus was born: 'What is hateful to you, do not do it to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is only interpretation.'²⁸

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