

JEWS AND CHRISTIANS: A TANGLED HISTORY

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Session 9: Modern Times

Part 1: Three Themes Leading Up to WW2

- Emancipation
- The rise of nationalism and antisemitism
- Migration

A. Emancipation - some major landmarks

(*Oxford English Dictionary*: 'Emancipation: The fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions; liberation')

- 1782: **Edict of Tolerance** issued by Joseph II (Austria)
- 1790: Decree recognizing the Sefardi Jews of France as citizens
- 1791: Full emancipation of the Jews of France
- 1796: Emancipation of Dutch Jews
- 1799: First emancipation in Rome
- 1812: Emancipation of Prussian Jews
- 1830: Greece grants citizenship to Jews
- 1848: Frankfurt Parliament emancipates the Jews (reversed in 1849)
- 1858: Jewish Relief Act allows Jews to sit in Parliament in Britain
- 1869: Emancipation of Jews in the North German Confederation
- 1871: Emancipation of Jews in Bavaria (southern Germany)

Changes in the status of Jews

Reform

- e.g. Joseph II's 'Edict of Tolerance' (1782), in the Austro-Hungarian empire
- *Some restrictions removed*: Jews allowed to send their children to Christian schools; no longer had to pay tax when they moved; did not have to wear recognizable Jewish dress
- *Some restrictions renewed or introduced*: Jews could still not move to Vienna; numbers of marriages still restricted; use of Hebrew and Yiddish in business documents banned

Revolution

- e.g. in France, in the aftermath of the French Revolution
- National Assembly of France, 28 September 1791
- The National Assembly, considering that the conditions requisite to be French citizen, and to become an active citizen, are fixed by the constitution, and that every man who, being duly qualified, takes the civic oath, and engages to fulfil all the duties prescribed by the constitution, has a right to all the advantages it insures:
- Annuls all adjournments, restrictions, and exceptions contained in the preceding decrees, affecting individuals of the Jewish persuasion, who shall take the civic oath, which shall be considered as a renunciation of all privileges in their favour.

B. The rise of nationalism and antisemitism

The Dreyfus Affair, 1894-1906



Dreyfus is stripped of his officer's sword and stripes after his conviction in 1894.

C. Migration



Jewish refugees from the Russian empire arriving in England, 1882

Anti-Jewish theological and ideological themes in Christianity

New Testament

Matthew 27: 25: All the people shouted to Pilate, ‘Let [Jesus] be crucified His blood be on us and on our children’.

John 8: 42-47: ⁴² Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot accept my word. ⁴⁴ You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.’

1 Thessalonians 2: 14-16: ¹⁴ For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God’s wrath has overtaken them at last.

Christopher M. Leighton, ‘Christian Theology after the Shoah’, in T. Frymer-Kensky, D. Novak, P. Ochs, D. F. Sandmel and M. A. Signer, eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (2000), p. 39

Christians found confirmation for these interpretations within salient historical events. The destruction of the Second Temple, the defeat of Bar Kochba, and the emergence of the triumphant church were heralded as irrefutable evidence in support of a displacement theology. The early Christians viewed every catastrophe that befell the Jewish community as just punishment for Jewish complicity in the murder of Jesus Christ.

Augustine (354-430), *Contra Faustum*, 13.12

The impious race (*genus*) of the carnal Jews will never die a bodily death. Whosoever would destroy them in this way will unleash a vengeance seven-fold, that is, he will bear away from them the seven-fold vengeance which I have wrapped around the Jewish people [to protect them] on account of their guilt in murdering Christ. Thus, the Jewish people will never perish, for the whole length of the seven days of time. They make visible to the Christian faithful the subjection that they merited because they, in the pride of their kingdom, put the Lord to death.

The actions of the churches in Nazi-occupied Europe

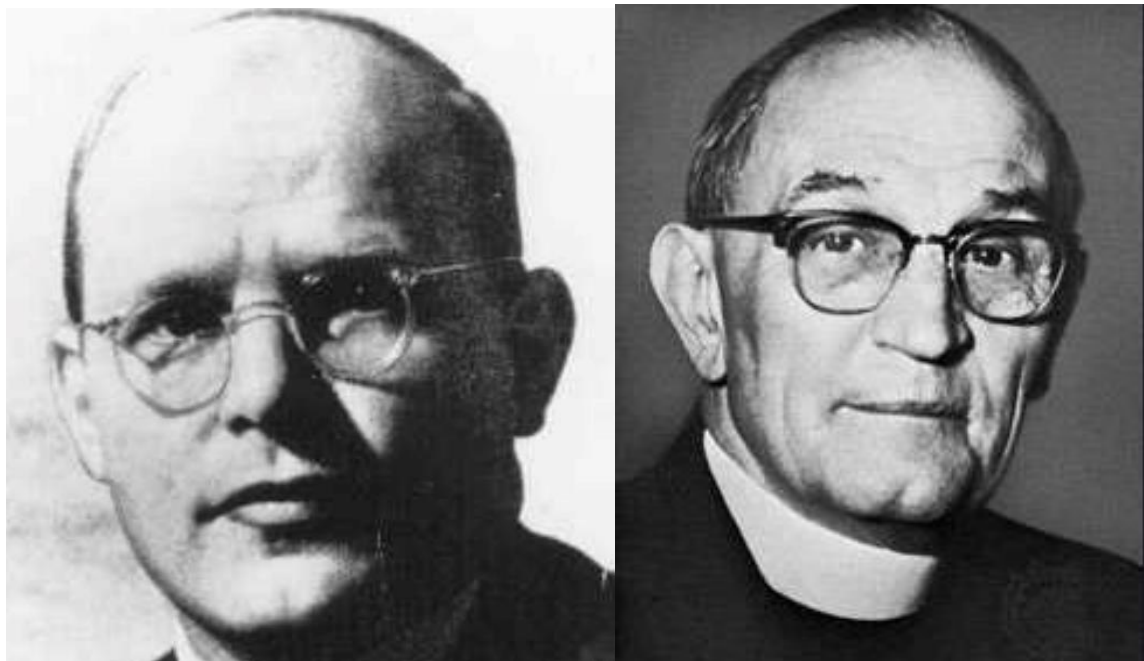
The Catholic Church

- Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) refused to issue condemnations of the Nazis' antisemitic policies and actions; although he knew of the death camps by September 1942, he denied this to the USA
- Before becoming pope, he had engineered a concordat between the Nazi government of Germany and the Catholic Church that safeguarded Catholic interests at the price of banning Catholic involvement in politics
- Many thousands of Jews were hidden in Catholic convents and monasteries throughout Europe; some of these refused to return Jewish children to their families at the end of the war
- Catholic bishops in the Netherlands sent a letter protesting the treatment of the Jews to the commander of the Nazi forces in the Netherlands in July 1942

The German Evangelical Church

- In the 1930s the Deutsche Christen ('German Christians') movement emerged, which embraced many of the nationalistic and racial aspects of Nazi ideology
- In opposition, the Bekennende Kirche ('Confessing Church') movement developed, which declared that its primary allegiance was to God and the scriptures, rather than to Hitler.
- Leaders of the Bekennende Kirche included Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed for his role in the conspiracy to overthrow the Nazi regime, and Pastor Martin Niemöller, who spent seven years in concentration camps for his criticisms of Hitler.
- Some members of the church aided and hid Jews.

Left: Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945); right: Martin Niemöller (1892-1984)



Questions that faced the Christian churches in the aftermath of the Holocaust

- How it was possible for 6 million Jews to be murdered by the citizens of a nation that was predominantly Christian?
- How had the churches elsewhere in Europe (i.e. outside the Nazi-occupied areas) and in the United States responded to the persecution and genocide?
- How far had traditional Christian doctrines and teachings, such as supersessionism, enabled the Nazis to pursue their aims and enlist the help of Christians?
- Did Christians bear some degree of responsibility for what had happened – and if so, how could they make amends, what could they do to prevent such things ever happening again?
- (After 1948): How did the foundation of the state of Israel affect traditional Christian understandings of the relationship between Christians and Jews?

Timeline of (some) events in the post-war development of Jewish-Christian relations

1930s-40s Scholars like James Parke (UK) and Jules Isaac (France) start investigating the history of Christian anti-Judaism

1947 ‘10 Points of Seelisberg’ issued by the Christian members of the newly formed International Council of Christians and Jews, including the rejection of ‘any presentation and conception of the Christian message which would support antisemitism under whatever form’

1948 At its founding assembly in Amsterdam, the World Council of Churches issues a statement: ‘We call upon all the churches we represent to denounce anti-Semitism, no matter what its origin, as absolutely irreconcilable with the profession and practice of the Christian faith. Anti-Semitism is a sin against God and man.’

1958 Pope John XXIII removed the phrase ‘the perfidious Jews’ from the Catholic Good Friday liturgy

1965 Catholic Church issues *Nostra Aetate*

Nostra Aetate (1965): extract from ch. 4

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ (see John 19:6), neither all Jews indiscriminately at that time, nor Jews today, can be charged with the crimes committed during his passion. It is true that the church is the new people of God, yet the Jews should not be spoken of as rejected or accursed as if this followed from holy scripture.... Remembering, then, its common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, it deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism directed against the Jews at any time or from any source.

Reaction from the American Jewish Committee

The American Jewish Committee welcomes the promulgation by Pope Paul VI and the Vatican Council of the Declaration on Non-Christians, as a turning point in 1900 years of Jewish-Christian history and the climax to a historic effort to bring about a new era in

relations between Catholics and Jews. A rejection of the charge of Jewish collective guilt for the Crucifixion and repudiation of antisemitism are significant clarifications of Church teachings that we hope will help purify the climate of relations between Christians and Jews throughout the world.

‘Follow-Up’ by the Catholic Church

1985: *Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church*

1986: Pope John Paul II visits a synagogue

1993: *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*

1993: Vatican establishes diplomatic relations with Israel

1998: *We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah*

1999: *Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past*

2000: Pope John Paul II visits Israel

2002: *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*

Protestant churches seeking Jewish-Christian reconciliation

Partial timeline of statements

1972: United Methodist Church (updated 1996)

1981: Church of Scotland

1982: Lutheran World Federation

1987: United Church of Christ

1987: Presbyterian Church (USA)

1994: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

1995: Alliance of Baptists

1998: United Church of Canada

2019: Church of England issues *God’s Unfailing Word*, with an ‘Afterword’ by Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

A Jewish response: *Dabru Emet* (‘Speak Truth’), 2000, main themes

1. Jews and Christians worship the same God
2. Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book
3. Christians can respect the claim of the Jews on the land of Israel
4. Jews and Christians together accept the moral principles of the Torah (Pentateuch)
5. Nazism is not a Christian phenomenon
6. The controversy between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in scripture and no-one should be pressed into believing another’s belief
7. A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice
8. Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace

Further Reading

James Carroll, 'The Holocaust and the Catholic Church', *The Atlantic* (1999)
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/10/the-holocaust-and-the-catholic-church/305061/>

Edward Kessler, *An Introduction to Jewish-Christian Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 2012)

David Novak, 'Supersessionism Hard and Soft', *First Things* (February 2019)
<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2019/02/supersessionism-hard-and-soft>

Geoffrey Wigoder, *Jewish-Christian Relations Since the Second World War* (Sherman Studies of Judaism in Modern Times, 1988)