

Learning Step by Step in the Jewish-Christian Dialogue

by Martin Stöhr

For the most part, the quest of Christians to redefine their relations with Jews began only after the annihilation of six million Jews had been passed over in silence by the great majority of Christians and non-Christians alike.¹ The Church of the Word was obliged by its shared responsibility for mass extermination to learn to reread the Bible. As Martin Niemöller said, it is and remains the guilt of the Church:

Those six million Jews, consequently, stand also on the charge sheet against Christians and the Church, not merely on that against the Nazi Party, the SS or — as one today would like to have it — against that mass murderer alone. Indeed, the guilt is most greatly born by the Church because she had to know, and knew, what she did when she did nothing.²

Dietrich Bonhoeffer underscored the indissoluble connection between recognition of guilt and confession of guilt. Both are required for taking steps toward a new future. Here, any kind of calculation (about the number of those killed, the deeds and misdeeds of others, etc.) is out of place.

Confession of guilt takes place without any sidelong glance at fellow-offenders. It is strictly exclusive in that it takes all guilt upon oneself. Wherever there is still a weighing up and calculation of guilt, there the sterile morality of self-justification usurps the place of the confession of guilt in the presence of the figure of Christ.³

We are only at the beginning of Jewish-Christian dialogue. In Germany, ninety-five percent of it does not consist of talks between Jews and Christians

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1. Earlier in this century, individuals such as Travers Herford and James Parkes had started to lay the foundations for a desirable change of Christian attitudes toward Judaism and the Jewish people. The efforts of these pioneers, however, received due recognition only in the perspective after World War II.
2. *Reden 1955–1957* (Darmstadt, 1958), p. 152.
3. *Ethik* (Munich, 1956), p. 44.

— we have let too few Jews survive for that. Rather, it consists above all of a critical analysis and purification of our own stock theological thought, of our Church practice, of our social responsibility, and of our national and economic structures. What follows will outline some of the necessary steps in that learning process.

Wronging the Stranger

At the beginning of Jewish-Christian dialogue after 1945, the initial assumption was often that one was dealing “only” with an ethical failure. At first it was asked how prejudices and misconduct toward minorities arise and how they are to be overcome. The Jewish people was exemplary for the case of many minorities and their negative experiences with the respective wielders of power and majority societies.

Theologically, what was demanded here was observance of the Second Commandment: “You shall not make for yourself any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth below...” (Ex. 20:4). Moreover: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the Land of Egypt” (Lev. 19:34). This task remains largely unsolved up to this day. Undoubtedly, Christian theologians have contributed to the creation of prejudices against Jews and Judaism, as when they reduce the Old Testament to the phrase “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” Above all, they have identified the Jewish renewal movement of the Pharisees with Judaism as a whole and tried to give both a bad name. A typical example is the following, taken from a book that purported to give the “essence of Christianity”:

They [the Pharisees] perceived God as a tyrant who watches over the ceremonial of His rules of the house, he [Jesus] breathed in the presence of God. They saw Him only in His Law, which they had transformed into a labyrinth of ravines, mazes and secret exits.... They possessed a thousand of His commandments and thus thought they knew Him; he had only one commandment and therefore he knew Him. They had made religion into a worldly trade — and there is nothing more detestable; he proclaimed the living God and the nobility of the soul.⁴

Such attitudes can reappear even when Christian theologians are seeking to promote toleration toward Jews. When Professor Werner Ross of Munich recently asked for understanding for the long memory of the Jews, he added: “This must not be forgotten and, since the Jews are not Christians, one cannot expect from them forgiveness.”⁵ How many passages in the Hebrew Bible, which are part of our prayers, liturgies and absolutions (for example, in the Eucharist), have their origin in the Old Testament and speak of forgiveness!

Consider, too, what happened in 1986 at a ceremony commemorating “Kristallnacht,” November 9, 1938, when the Nazi regime unleashed a State pogrom against German Jewry and its synagogues and institutions. The Mayor of Neuss addressed himself to Jews and Christians, but in particular to the Jews:

4. *Das Wesen des Christentums* (Leipzig, 1901), p. 33.

5. *Rheinischer Merkur*, February 6, 1987, on “Christ and the World.”

The overwhelming majority of us here are Christians, who consider forgiveness, love for one's neighbor and mutual understanding as essential characteristics. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth are concepts that merely impede coexistence. It is my sincere appeal, therefore, that such a confrontation should not recur. Also in future, slip-ups and unfortunate utterances will be inevitable....⁶

The "slip-up" to which he alluded was the scandal caused by Mayor Graf Spee of Korschenbroich, who had joked about killing "once again a rich Jew" in order to replenish the cash-box of the community. For the Mayor of Neuss, it became the means of turning a Kristallnacht commemoration into an occasion for giving the Jews a lesson about "Christian forgiveness." Prejudices of a theological type are particularly harmful because they are also absorbed and applied by non-Christians in a secularized form. They are tenacious.

Honoring God Alone

There is a long history of theological prejudices endangering the survival of minorities. Christians and the Church should be reminded about how much they let themselves be integrated into Roman imperial power and imperial ideology, or later into traditions of German national authority. Under the rule of Emperor Constantine from 313 C.E., the consequence was that Christian doctrines (e.g., Christology) became imperial laws, thereby excluding Jews and other dissidents. Later, disdain for politics and an obedient attitude to State authorities were esteemed as Christian virtues. Theologically, the question is whether one takes seriously the First Commandment: not to ascribe to any penultimate authority, be it State, nation or race, validity alongside the ultimate and primary authority of the One and Only God. Only He frees man from false bonds. Criticism of State and society was made taboo by Christians.

Theologians created a justification for that attitude in the "doctrine of the two realms," which is a commonplace in the writings of Luther. The Danish resistance fighter and Lutheran priest Kai Munk, who was killed by the Germans in November 1941, characterized the doctrine as follows:

We Christians were given the duty of giving to Caesar what is due to Caesar, and we have obeyed this order; we were the most loyal citizens of the State. But when Caesar demanded more than his due, then nobody was more rebellious than we were. We were not to be suppressed, year by year, decade by decade, century by century, until we triumphed. When he asked us to label black as white, despotism as freedom, lie as truth, excess and violence as justice, then we answered him: "It is written, 'You shall have no other Gods but Me.'" That all sounds very fine; but Christianity is supposed to be apolitical, it is claimed. The Church should concern itself with nothing but the salvation of our souls. That is a nice religion. If little Meier can just adapt himself and go to heaven, why on earth should he otherwise care about the world? Let them go to hell. That is a religion to Caesar's taste; he willingly grants it state support. This religion will never thwart him. It is a religion called blasphemy. The truth is not quiet,

6. *Frankfurter Rundschau*, November 11, 1986.

dignified and sublime; it is pungent, provocative and aggressive. The truth is not meant for timid people; they do not need the truth but a sofa.⁷

On the contrary, Christians need to relearn a tradition that calls a spade a spade, that contradicts, protests, demonstrates and resists. Primo Levi, the Italian chemist and survivor of Auschwitz who recently committed suicide, wrote in his memoirs: "We gathered in the gymnasium of the Talmud Torah School and taught one another to rediscover in the Bible justice and injustice, and the strength that conquers injustice."⁸

That biblical tradition should be learned and loved afresh. It is implied in what Konrad Adenauer wrote to Pastor Dr. Custodis, on February 23, 1946:

It cannot really be maintained that the public was unaware that the Nazi regime and the army command constantly violated, as a matter of principle, natural law, the Hague convention and the most elementary precepts of humanity. I believe that the bishops could have prevented a great deal, had they jointly taken a public stand against it from the pulpit on a certain day. That did not happen, and there is no excuse for it. If, as a result, the bishops had been imprisoned or sent to a concentration camp, it would not have been a pity — on the contrary.⁹

Therefore, one also has to keep in mind the tradition of the Confessional Church. Why are there not today persons who will jointly commit themselves to oppose and resist injustice and violence? That is, committing oneself as formulated by the Confessional Church in October 1933:

1. I pledge to carry out my task as a servant of the Word, solely committed to the Holy Scriptures and to the confessions of faith of the Reformation as the true exegesis of the Holy Scriptures.

2. I pledge to protest unreservedly against each and every violation of such a state of confession of faith.

3. I regard myself as co-responsible, to the best of my ability, for those who are persecuted because of such a state of confession of faith.

4. In such commitment, I testify that a violation of the state of confession of faith has been created by the application of the Aryan Paragraph in the area of the Church of Christ.

The following was written in the 1936 memorandum of the Provisional Administration of the German Protestant Church, addressed to Hitler. Although not fully implemented, it still provides a good example for how churches and Christians have to call a spade a spade and intervene on behalf of the persecuted:

If an antisemitic attitude, demanding a commitment to hatred of Jews, is forced upon Christians in the framework of the National Socialist world view, then they see it opposed by the Christian commandment to love one's neighbor.... The Protestant conscience, which considers itself co-responsible for the people and the government, is extremely burdened by the fact that in Germany, which understands itself to be a state subject

7. From H.W. Bähr ed., *Die Stimme des Menschen* (Munich, 1961), pp. 248 f.

8. *Das periodische System* (Munich, 1987), p. 58.

9. From G. Denzler and V. Fabricius eds., *Die Kirchen im Dritten Reich*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt, 1984), p. 255.

to the rule of law, there are still concentration camps, and that measures of the Gestapo are not subject to any judicial surveillance.¹⁰

Acknowledging Our Jewish Roots

In the beginnings of the Jewish-Christian dialogue, it came as a surprise to many Christians to discover that their Christian faith is rooted in the Jewish people and its rich traditions. This is not only a historical fact but also a valid statement today about the things that we have permanently in common. Some of those things are mentioned in the study on "Christians and Jews" published by the Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (the roof organization of German Protestants) in 1975: belief in the same God; the Holy Scriptures; the joint task to be the witnesses of God in the world for love and justice, liberation and human dignity, responsibility for the world and hope, peace and redemption.

The fact that Jesus was a Jew is reappearing through the Hellenistic and Western layers of Christian theology. The biblical message is richer than has been transmitted to us by the exegesis introduced in the West. We must therefore protest when a "Manual of Christian Ethics" states that the "commandment of love" stems from Jesus.¹¹ The dual commandment of love¹² is in fact the summary of the Hebrew Bible and of Jewish faith. We Christians have made much of Romans 13:1: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." Why have we valued that statement more than verses 8 and 11 of the same chapter, which say that "he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the Law" — a genuine Jewish principle? In this world, God's truth requires the testimony of two witnesses — the Jewish people and the Church. Has the Church lived up to that task?

Romans 9–11 and all those passages which speak about the promise to Israel which has never been rescinded (e.g., Rom. 15:8–9 or 9:1–5) have to be reread. Why have we Christians not recognized that in the morning prayer of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) every Jew prays: "Our Father, our King, have mercy and answer us, for we have no merits"? Why have we not discovered in the Jewish tradition, as in this example, the theory of justification by faith? Instead, we have sought to reduce Judaism to a religion of achievement and legalism, as if these features could not also be found in Christianity as a perversion of the entire biblical message. In the Midrash on Psalms (to Ps. 72), we read: "When we have merits and when we perform good deeds, then He gives us from what is ours; but when not, then He shows us justice and grace according to what is His. Is there one more just than He is?" On Psalm 112:1, the rabbinic commentary says:

"Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments" — Rabbi Eleazar comments: "Thus it is taught: He says: 'Be

10. *Kirchliches Jahrbuch* (Gütersloh, 1948), p. 133.

11. A. Hertz, W. Korff, T. Rendtorff and H. Ringeling eds., *Handbuch der christlichen Ethik* (Basle, Vienna and Gütersloh, 1979). vol. 1, p. 259.

12. Mt. 22:37–39 and parallels, where Jesus is quoting Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18.

not like servants who serve a master thinking of reward, but be like servants who serve a master without thinking of reward.” (bAvodah Zarah 19a)

More than an Ethical Failure

As was said, after 1945 many at first looked “only” for an ethical failure. But the quest had to go deeper. It was not enough to probe the reasons for Christian susceptibility to prejudices, to idolizing the State, to social and economic accommodation, and to servile behavior. The specifically Christian contributions to hostility against Jews had to be examined.

In this context, I wish to mention above all the accusation of “deicide.” It was integrated into various scapegoat theories suggesting that Israel must suffer because it crucified Jesus or rejected him as Messiah. This reproach was also woven into the legend of the “wandering Jew” Ahasuerus — a Christian invention; it claims that the Jews have had to suffer ceaselessly throughout history because they rejected Jesus. Thus Jewish suffering was not combated and overcome but justified, just as if the Christians and churches were sitting with their dogmatic systems at the Day of the Last Judgment and had to pronounce final verdicts.

This miserable practice began very early. In 170 C.E., Bishop Melito of Sardis formulated this reproach in a brilliant Passion sermon. Much of the sermon paraphrases the Jewish Passover Haggadah. Then comes his message for Christians. Like the “essence of Christianity” in the quotation given above, it consists of contrasting Jesus with “them.”

(43) And the People of Israel was made void by the creation of the Church, and the prototype was dissolved by the appearance of the Lord. And today, what was once valuable has become valueless by the revelation of the essentially valuable.... (79) And you tied his beautiful hands, which had formed you from earth; and his beautiful mouth, which had nourished you with life, you nourished with gall; and you killed your Lord on the Great Feast. (80) And you were joyful, but he starving; you drank wine and ate bread, but he vinegar and gall.... (82) But you were not found to be Israel, for you did not see God; you did not recognize the Lord, you did not know, O Israel, that he is the first-born of God.... (93) You have killed your Lord in the midst of Jerusalem! (94) Hearken, all families of nations and behold: A murder without precedent occurred in the midst of Jerusalem, in the city of the law, in the city of the Hebrews, in the city of the prophets, in the city considered just! And who was murdered? Who is the murderer?.... (96) He who hung up the earth was hung up; he who fastened the heavens was fastened; he who set up the universe was set up on a tree. The Master was abused; God was murdered; the King of Israel was done away with by the Israelite hand.

Anti-Jewish Anti-Nazism

Christians sought to establish their Christian position by negating the Jewish position. Or they propounded a qualitative opposition between letter and spirit, promise and fulfillment, Law and Gospel, revenge and love, old and new, always attributing negative characteristics to the Old Testament and positive

ones to the New Testament. The Church claimed to be the true Israel and to have disinherited and superseded the Old Israel. The dramaturgy of the Passion plays, such as Oberammergau, and of many sermons and educational models, depends on painting a dark background against which the figure and work of Jesus are brought into bright relief, as if he approached his Jewish basis in a spirit of competition or even hostility. This attitude characterized not merely Christians who collaborated with Nazism, but even leading Christians who opposed it.

During Advent 1933, nearly a year after the Nazis came to power, Cardinal Faulhaber preached a series of sermons in Munich against the Nazi defamation of the Old Testament. He found it necessary to start these sermons on December 3 with the classical summary of Christian anti-Judaism, to which he assented:

We must first distinguish between the People of Israel before and after the death of Christ. Before the death of Christ...the People of Israel was the vehicle of divine Revelation.... It is only with this Israel of the early biblical period that my Advent sermons will deal. After the death of Christ, Israel was dismissed from the service of Revelation. She had not known the time of her visitation. She had repudiated and rejected the Lord's Anointed, had driven him out of the city and nailed him to the Cross.... The daughter of Zion received the bill of divorce and from that time on, Ahasuerus has wandered for ever restless over the face of the earth.¹³

Adolf Schlatter was a New Testament scholar. He knew the rabbinic writings well enough to write commentaries on the Gospels that quote extensively from them, showing how the Greek of the one parallels the Hebrew or Aramaic of the other. Yet he thought he could discredit Nazism by portraying it as the means by which Judaism was triumphing over Christianity.

During Christmas, Germany looks strange. Now, all of sudden, numerous convinced Germans march arm in arm with Jewry. We have pushed out the Jews from the Reichstag and the universities, from offices, theaters and newspapers. Now, however, we lend them our support for their most important request.... As, however, blindness and cowardice are not suitable for us, who live in the Third Reich, it cannot be denied that the situation for the Jew's world view has never been as propitious as nowadays in the German domain. He can only rejoice that Christmas is replaced by the solstice celebration, and that the idea is instilled into youth that their sole confession is, from now on, to be Germans because for them the name "Christ" has supposedly lost its meaning.... The Nordic soul is prone to sense something of Jesus' greatness for the reason that it despises those who strive, in a cowardly and feeble manner, for their own well-being only. Against this abuse of life, nobody has fought as earnestly and as victoriously as Jesus did. Judaism has never had a stronger opponent than he was. He did not bow to the masters in their pulpits, and was not bound to what the priests did in the temple. He was above the Holy

13. *Judentum, Christentum, Germanentum* (Munich, 1933), p. 11.

Law and treated the Scriptures as their master. It was not Judaism that maintained him; the reason for his strength rested in himself.¹⁴

Schlatter did not go as far as another New Testament scholar, Herbert Grundmann, who undertook the historical and theological attempt to describe Jesus of Nazareth as an Aryan. Nonetheless, it is conspicuous in Schlatter's pamphlet how absolutely blind he was to the humiliated and murdered Jews, who had just been defined as subhumans under the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 — precisely commented by Globke, later Secretary of State under Adenauer. At the same time, it is striking how Schlatter uproots Jesus, separating him from God and the Holy Scriptures.

The well-known New Testament scholar and theologian Rudolf Bultmann was a leading opponent of the Nazi "Aryan Paragraph." Even after World War II, however, he could write in his "Theology of the New Testament":

Israel was the Elect People of God; but the election hovered, as it were, always only as a destiny and promise above and before it, destining its history in the sequence of divine guidance and blessing and punishment, yet never realizing itself.... Israel as a whole, however, was itself rejected because it had rejected Jesus. The Christian community is the true People of God (cf. Mk. 12:1–11).¹⁵

Christian Otherworldliness

The previous section intentionally quoted three theologians who were no Nazis, yet who stood for the anti-Jewish spirit that facilitated the Nazis' work. From their perspective, the Christians stand for a historical idealism. They exempt themselves from the thought of realizing the Kingdom of God, the heart of the preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, and shift redemption to inwardness or to the other world beyond death. The fact that Christians and churches were unfaithful, perpetrating atrocities throughout the centuries, is treated as a minor matter. The faith of the Jews, on the other hand, is disregarded, together with their stirring prayers, self-criticism and passionate struggle to understand the meaning of the destruction of the Second Temple (e.g., in rabbinic literature or in 4 Ezra).

Christians are sitting on God's tribunal and know the definitive judgment for the Jewish people. They treat Jewish history within the framework of a historical materialism in which the destruction of the Second Temple witnesses that the history of Israel is over. Following a tradition of Christian historians, Martin Noth concludes his "History of Israel" with the reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the defeat of the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 C.E. His last sentence reads: "Thus ended the ghastly epilogue of Israel's history."¹⁶

Even if Noth's book had not been published after the creation of the State of Israel, we could have asked: How could the author know that the history of Israel has come to an end? Where is the validity of God's promise and commandments to Israel, reaffirmed not only in Romans 9–11? Where is the

14. *Wird der Jude über uns siegen?* (Essen, 1935), pp. 3 ff.

15. *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen, 1954), p. 96.

16. *Geschichte Israels* (Göttingen, 1954), p. 406.

respect for Jesus' exhortation not to anticipate the Last Judgment by seeking to separate the wheat from the tares (Mt. 13:24–30, 36–43)? Where is the respect for the biblical and Jewish self-understanding, which cannot unilaterally annul the Word of God for Israel? Where is the perception of Jewish positions that are also familiar with a great freedom from the Law? It was a leading rabbi who said: "On the day when the Temple was destroyed, there fell an iron wall that had raised itself up between Israel and the Father in heaven."¹⁷ Why do Christians not listen to the Jewish remonstrance: "What only comes in eternity, never comes in eternity"? In these words, Franz Rosenzweig criticized the unbiblical spiritualization and otherworldliness of Christian faith.

Hans Ehrenberg was a Christian from a Jewish family. Having already been dismissed from his professorship of philosophy at Heidelberg university, in 1937 he was repudiated in a very un-Christian way by the Westphalian Protestant Church of which he had become a pastor. Was he right when he suggested: "Judaism has been used by Christianity as a springboard from which to leap in completion and perfection into heaven, and after it has provided this service, it gets a kick"?¹⁸

The successive volumes of the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, a standard reference work found in university libraries, were for years edited by Gerhard Kittel. After World War II, on account of his Nazi connections, he lost his post and was even interned. Now edited by Gerhard Friedrich, the volume containing the article on *soteria* ("salvation") appeared in 1961. How am I to understand the scholarly character of this dictionary when, following an excellent discussion of salvation in the Old Testament, we read about what *soteria* signifies in the New Testament?

The *soteria* of the New Testament does not refer to earthly conditions. It contains neither welfare, health of body and spirit, as the Greeks understand it, nor a worldly deliverance of God's people from heathen yoke, as in Judaism.... It deals exclusively with the relation between Man and God. Therefore, neither a complete self-control of man by autonomous reason — as in Greek philosophy — nor a completely accomplished penitence, i.e., the absolute acceptance of the heteronomously perceived Torah — as in Pharisaism — will lead to salvation.

What was done in Auschwitz confronts Christians with the question: Are they willing to perpetuate the lie of a Christianity that understands the Christian faith to be detached from all "earthly conditions" and, consequently, without any need to concern itself with persecuted and murdered human beings, nor with a policy aimed in that direction? Or do they prefer, after all, to adhere to the life-saving message of the entire Bible? This biblical message was formulated as follows by Abraham Heschel, a rabbi expelled from Berlin and later professor of philosophy in Toronto:

"The Gods attend to great matters; they neglect small ones," Cicero maintains. According to Aristotle, the gods are not concerned at all with the dispensation of good and bad fortune or external things. To the

17. Rabbi Eleazar, quoted by L. Baeck in *Das Wesen des Judentums* (Darmstadt, no date), p. 184.

18. *Paradoxien des Evangeliums* (Munich, 1957), p. 15.

Hebrew prophet, however, no subject is as worthy of consideration as the plight of man. Indeed, God himself is described as reflecting over the plight of man rather than as contemplating eternal ideas. His mind is preoccupied with man, with the concrete actualities of history rather than with the timeless issues of thought. The teaching of Judaism is the theology of the common deed. The Bible insists that God is concerned with everydayness, with the trivialities of life. The great challenge does not lie in organizing solemn demonstrations, but in how we manage the commonplace. The prophet's field of concern is not the mysteries of heaven, the glories of eternity, but the blights of society, the affairs of the market place. He addresses himself to those who trample upon the needy, who increase the price of grain, use dishonest scales, and sell the refuse of corn.¹⁹

This accurate description of the biblical message unmask the kind of Christian belief described in the previous quotations as a belief in pagan gods. It is not a belief in the biblical God, who addresses both consolation and demands to His creatures and, first of all, to His people Israel.

Our Messianic Hope

Jesus of Nazareth unites Jews and Christians. As the Christ in whom Christians believe, admittedly, he separates Jews and Christians. On the positive side, however, should we not learn as Christians that the Jewish waiting for the Messiah who is to come, for the initiator of the Kingdom of God, unites us — who wait for him to return — with them? Furthermore, should we not learn that in the Jewish “no” to Jesus as the Messiah, as Christ, there lies a loyal adherence to the biblical message, taught throughout the Bible, that the renewal of heaven and earth is more than what Church and Christianity have brought?

There is a story in which a boy runs to the rabbi, asking him to blow the shofar that announces the arrival of the Messiah. The rabbi goes to the four windows of his house and looks in all directions. Here, he hears a child crying, there, he sees a sick woman, from another window, he hears rumors of war, from the fourth, he sees starving people. He closes the windows and says to the boy: “No, the Messiah has not yet arrived.”

This Jewish attitude reflects a deep faith in God and His Word: that the renewal of heaven and earth is a genuine renewal of the entire creation. It was noted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “The Jews keep open the question of Christ.”²⁰ Israel prevents Christians from making Christ into a possession that is defended by a doctrine, a Christology, against other people. The Bible — so Bonhoeffer's remark can be understood — insists not that Jesus Christ expects from us, who possess him, a Christology — but that he expects nothing other than an imitation of Christ. Why have we Christians not loved and praised the Jewish people for having brought Christ? Why have we pinned on them the reproach of being the murderers of Christ and God? Is this not the most evil denial by Christians of justification by faith?

19. From “The White Man on Trial,” in *The Insecurity of Freedom* (New York, 1972), pp. 102–103.

20. *Ethik* (Munich, 1956), p. 31.

On April 21, 1918, Franz Rosenzweig wrote to Hans Ehrenberg, with whom he had one of the most profound Jewish-Christian dialogues: "We shall see whether or not Jesus was the Messiah when — the Messiah arrives."²¹ When Christians cannot endure the hope for the coming Kingdom of God, this hope is either objectified to dogmatism, to a church as "salvation institute" claiming infallibility, or to a hostile image of the Jewish people, in which this hope is alive. Abraham Heschel, who spoke of Israel as the "father and mother" of Christianity, also wrote: "The children did not arise and call the mother blessed; instead they called the mother blind."²²

Institutional Irresponsibility

A critical analysis of the Nazi period shows that not only people, but also institutions, let themselves be used and manipulated against God and God's images. Natural science and technology, industry and culture, church and university, school and bureaucracy, law and military — they all let themselves be put in the service of the annihilation of the Jewish people. Their active members had abdicated responsibility to those institutions. One excuse they gave was that "orders are orders." Another was to point out that science or the Christian faith had sufficiently shown what to think of the Jews, so that what happened to them seemed somehow to be justified, even if one did not personally wish it.

The institutions concerned, however, did not assume the responsibility abdicated to them by individuals. In 1953, Albert Einstein wrote to his friend Max Born when Born returned to Germany, to the "country of the mass murderers," that "the collective conscience is a very miserable plant, which always tends to wither when it is needed."²³ Indeed, collectives and institutions acted without any scruple and conscience. The Christian faith had deprived itself of its social and political dimension when it made the claim — which a look at the Bible shows to be false — that only an individual could have a conscience.

On top of that came the law of the division of labor in modern society. Nobody is responsible for the whole; everybody functions in some divided-off part of the work. Division of labor leads to division of conscience. Nobody asked the question: Who benefits from what we are doing? What are we here for? Do institutions exist for the sake of people, or people for the sake of institutions? This is a good Jewish question; the Mekhilta comments (on Ex. 31:13) that "the Sabbath is given over to the human being, not the human being to the Sabbath." David Flusser has discussed the connection between this principle and Jesus' interpretation of the Sabbath commandments.²⁴

21. *Die Schrift* (Frankfurt, no date), p. 226.

22. From "Protestant Renewal: A Jewish View," in op. cit., note 19 above, p. 169.

23. A. Einstein/M. Born: *Briefwechsel 1916–1955* (Munich, 1969), p. 166. At the beginning of this correspondence, Born was Einstein's colleague in Berlin. In 1954, Born was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics.

24. See Flusser's *Jesus in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1968), p. 47. This ground-breaking short book has been translated into several languages, including English. The connection mentioned was already noticed by Grotius.

In such institutions, the ethical subject had disappeared. The American historian Raul Hilberg gave the example of IG-Farben in his classic study, *The Destruction of the European Jews*.²⁵ IG-Farben was a headless colossus, an autonomous machine rushing relentlessly ahead. When its factory based on slave labor from the death camp was set up, there was no ethical agent involved that decided to work Jews to death. Rather, a constantly renewed source of cheap labor was treated like an endless source of cheap raw materials. Mass murder became a waste product of a science, technology and industry that were totally unconcerned with humanity or the human individual.

Albert Speer, Hitler's minister for armaments and builder of the concentration camps, wrote in his memoirs: "Hitler's dictatorship was the first dictatorship of an industrial state in this age of modern technology, a dictatorship that employed to perfection the instruments of technology to dominate its own people.... There arose, as a consequence, the type of the uncritical receiver of orders."²⁶ A rationality that operates only instrumentally, disregarding the biblical supreme virtues of justice and love, redemption and Shalom, dehumanizes the human being to a time-server. Or it turns the human being into a function of a machine whose workings are opaque to him and in whose direction he plays no part.

Church and State

Dietrich Bonhoeffer proposed²⁷ three possible ways for the Church to behave toward the State. 1) The Church must be ready to ask about the legitimacy of the State's behavior: not merely whether something is law, but whether it is just. History shows that there are unjust laws. Christians and churches have to bring justice to bear. 2) Churches and Christians are responsible not only for Christians, but for all victims of unjust behavior by the State. 3) Christians must not only bury or dress the wounds of the victims run over by the wheels, but grasp the spokes of the wheels and stop the production of more and more victims.

The concept of civic courage that is expected here from Christians and churches, individuals and institutions, is the ancient Christian concept of resistance; it takes the form of calling a spade a spade, protesting, demonstrating, resisting and accepting martyrdom. Althusius, the lawyer and theologian from Herborn, once put it, like Bonhoeffer, by using the image of the wheel. On a ship steered by errors, madness, illness or drunkenness, the fellow-voyagers have to grasp the ship's wheel by its spokes. The reduction of Christian responsibility to assistance in individual cases is not enough. Martin Luther King once said in a sermon that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho has to be diverted, if time and again people fall into the hands of brigands.

25. Chicago, 1961.

26. *Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1969), p. 522.

27. *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Munich, 1959), p. 48.

Conclusion

We are indeed only at the beginning of our dialogue. Yet the hope holds good for us, as Martin Buber once expressed in 1928 at a meeting of religious socialists in Heppenheim:

We cannot call it a utopia where we have not yet tested our powers. Only when we go ahead, will we discover how much room for action God grants us.²⁸

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28. *Sozialismus aus dem Glauben* (Zurich and Leipzig, 1929), p. 93.