

## CHAPTER 1

# Anti-Semitism

*“The sun has never shown on a more bloodthirsty and vengeful people than they [the Jews] are who imagine that they are God’s people.”<sup>1</sup>*

The term “anti-Semitism” was coined by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr in 1879.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, he also founded “The League of Anti-Semites” (*Antisemiten-Liga*), designed to protect Germany from the alleged threat of Jewish commercialism. This anti-Jewish stance was quickly linked with the racist theory of French philosopher Joseph A. de Gobineau, who distinguished between a strong Nordic race, the Aryans, and a weak race, the Semites.<sup>3</sup> The designation Semite is derived from the name of Noah’s son, Shem (Gen 9:19). Aryan is a Sanskrit word meaning “noble.” It became a designation for people who populated a large region in the Far East, now India. German National Socialists (“Nazis”) and Adolf Hitler linked the Indo-Germanic languages to this mythical race. They defined Aryan as a white, Caucasian super-race, destined to create a new millennial world order. Today, a distinction is made between anti-Semitism (a prejudice against a biological heritage that includes both

Jews and Arabs) and anti-Judaism (a prejudice that specifically targets the Jewish faithful for their beliefs, often based on misunderstandings and false assumptions). Older literature was less careful in making this distinction.<sup>4</sup>

## A History of Contempt

Anti-Judaism is as old as Judaism itself.<sup>5</sup> It has peculiar roots in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian Old Testament. Rabbinic interpreters blame Judaism itself for its conflict with the non-Jewish world. They see this conflict already foreshadowed in the story of Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:21—35:29).<sup>6</sup> It is a dramatic story whose details could easily become the libretto of an opera filled with intrigue, deceit, and a happy ending. Attention to these details is necessary in order to comprehend the birth pangs of Israel as God’s chosen people in the midst of other nations.

The twins represent two nations (Jacob the Jew and Esau the non-Jew) already struggling with each other in the womb of their mother Rebekah (Gen 25:22). She did not want to live with the situation and asked God about for guidance.

The Lord said to her, “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.” (Gen 25:23)

Esau was born first, a hairy man, a skillful hunter, and an outdoorsman. Jacob had smooth skin, was contemplative, and lived in tents. Their father Isaac loved Esau; their mother loved Jacob. The fraternal differences increased when Esau, famished after hard labor in the field, asked his brother Jacob to share a meal consisting of “red stuff” (*adom* in Hebrew for “red,” and Esau’s later name, Gen 25:30). Jacob agreed, but under the condition that Esau would trade his birthright as the older son for the meal. This transaction discloses the differences as well as the lack of trust between the two brothers.

Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?” Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (Gen 25:32-34)

The moral pressure of the story increases when Rebekah compels Jacob, her favorite son, to pose as Esau after her old and almost blind husband Isaac had asked Esau to prepare a savory last meal before death as the ritual step of blessing the firstborn son. Although Esau hunts for the meal, Rebekah prepares it. She tells Jacob to wear Esau's clothes, and she covers his smooth skin with the skins of a kid so that Isaac would identify him as Esau. When Isaac asks him who he is, Jacob responds that he is Esau. Isaac feels the hairy skin, but wonders why the meal is ready so soon. Jacob shifts his trickery into high gear. He tells his father that the meal was prepared quickly "because the Lord our God granted me success" (Gen 27:20). Isaac is satisfied and blesses Jacob, assuming that he is Esau. Immediately after Jacob leaves his dying father, Esau returns with his meal, asking to be blessed. Isaac admits to having been fooled by Jacob, but cannot give a second blessing to Esau who begged for it. He solemnly utters a prophecy to Esau, who cries out and weeps.

See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose, you shall break his yoke from your neck. (Gen 27:39-40)

Esau vows to kill his brother Jacob (Gen 27:41). When Rebekah hears of the threat, she tells Jacob to hide with members of her family far away. Then she persuades her old husband to bless a marriage between Jacob and one of the daughters of Laban, the brother of Rebekah. Isaac agrees and blesses Jacob as the future leader of Israel (Gen 27:42—28:5). Jacob marries Rachel and Leah, daughters of Laban (Gen 29:1-30) and is told by God in a dream that he was chosen to be the leader of "Israel," a name God gave him. (Gen 35:10). The twins reconcile (Gen 33:1-17). Esau becomes the "father" of the Edomites, and Jacob heads the people of Israel.

Rabbinical interpreters of this complex story of Jacob's immoral behavior (deceiving his father to receive the blessing of the first-born) see this deception as a cause for divine punishment by "other nations." But God is not consistent in dealing with Israel. God "hardens" the heart of Pharaoh (Exod 4:21) to keep the Jews in slavery, but also uses Moses to liberate them for the exodus to the "promised land." Again, God hardens the hearts of Joshua's enemies so that Joshua can utterly destroy them

in battle (Josh 11:20). Such mysterious divine logic is woven into the Old Testament asserting the unique power of the God of Israel who controls the destinies of friend and foe. In this sense, anti-Judaism becomes a mystical, seemingly paradoxical device of God's to purify and uplift "the chosen people."

Just as the Jewish god has manipulated the Other Nations to punish his people, so Gentile hatred of Jews is to be understood most fundamentally as a divinely inspired device to prevent Jews from disappearing, from becoming ordinary and blending into Other Nations. The separatism of the Jews and their inability to forget their origins generate Gentile hostility, while that very hostility contributes to a lasting sense among Jews of unalterable separateness and difference from non-Jews. In short, eternal Jewishness and eternal anti-Semitism are somehow in the nature of things, part of a divine plan. Human efforts to mitigate the mutual hostility, seemingly effective in the short run, are in the long run futile.<sup>7</sup>

This mysterious link of Jewishness and anti-Semitism has generated assertions that Jewish suffering and punishment are deserved. As a Jewish chronicler [no name available] of the first Christian crusade put it in 1096, filled with vengeance and guilt: "The fault is ours! . . . Our sins permitted the enemy to triumph; the hand of the Lord weighed heavily upon his people."<sup>8</sup> Some modern Jewish thinkers favor exile, not life in a Promised Land, because Jews should not become like "other nations," corrupted by power. "It became clear to me," wrote Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Polish Jewish writer and Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1978, "that only in exile did Jews grow up spiritually."<sup>9</sup>

### *Deicide and Blood Libel*

The attitudes of "other nations" to Jews in the pre-Christian era disclose reasonable toleration. Neither the Egyptians who enslaved the Israelites, nor the Greeks and Romans who rejected Jewish religion, persecuted Jews for racial reasons. There were occasional outbreaks of violence over religion. In 167 B.C.E., the Jewish leader Mattathias and his son Judas Maccabaeus revolted against the Hellenistic regime of Antiochus Epiphanes, which then permitted the establishment of a Jewish kingdom that lasted

for a century until Rome destroyed it (65 B.C.E. to 63 C.E.). During the rule of the Maccabees, named after Judas Maccabaeus, Jews began celebrating their freedom from Hellenism in the annual festival of Hanukkah (which coincides more or less with Christmas). When Alexander the Great (352–323 B.C.E.) ruled the Eastern Mediterranean, Jews were part of the intellectual elite in the city of Alexandria. There were occasional clashes between Roman officials and Jews; but Rome opposed Jewish nationalism, rather than the religion of Israel. Jews in Rome were safe while Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Without a land, Jews became dispersed and their numbers dwindled.

The first Christians were viewed by the Romans as a Jewish sect. But soon this Jewish sect developed a negative attitude toward the Jews. This attitude immediately focused on the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah. In the Gospel of Matthew, his death is demanded by an angry, bloodthirsty crowd. When Pontius Pilate refused to crucify Jesus, saying, “See to it yourselves,” they responded, “His blood be on us and on our children” (Matt 27:25).<sup>10</sup>

The demand for the execution of Jesus and the prophecy about his blood became the two roots for the massive growth of Christian anti-Judaism: the charge of deicide and the “blood libel.” Both roots grew out of the soil of irrational contempt. The charge of deicide falsely assumes that Jews knew Jesus as the second person of the Trinity, that is, as God. It is recorded that some passersby mocked Jesus on the cross for claiming to be “the son of God” (Matt 27:40). But it is unlikely that this was said by Jews. The medieval charge known as the “blood libel” communicates the notion that Jews advocate the continual shedding of Christian blood, exemplified by rumors of stealing a consecrated Christian host (the “real presence” of Christ in the Eucharist) and stabbing it with a knife. The continual killing of Jesus as the eucharistic Christ was linked to the equally senseless rumors that Jews killed Christian children as a blood sacrifice. The difference between fact and fiction is illustrated by one of the many reports of Jewish infanticide, appearing in 1235 in Fulda, Germany.<sup>11</sup> A fire in a home killed five young sons while their parents attended Mass on Christmas Eve. The Jews in town were accused of murdering the sons for ritual reasons, siphoning off the blood of the children into waxed bags. An enraged mob murdered thirty-four Jews in revenge. When authorities investigated the report

about the Jewish blood libel, they could not produce any evidence in support of the charge of infanticide. Although other such rumors continued to multiply, they could never be supported by facts. But Christian fanaticism continued to demonize the Jews as murderers of God and of Christian children.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells the Jews, “You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father’s desires” (John 8:44). This passage was used to demonize the Jews as part of a “fifth column” of the Antichrist, infiltrating the church to hasten the end of the world by persecuting Christians. The Acts of the Apostles, written by Luke, condemned the Jews for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do” (Acts 7:51). Research has shown that some anti-Judaic polemics have been interpolated into the New Testament. The classic example is 1 Thessalonians 2:13-16, where Paul allegedly advocates the “blood libel”: The Jews killed Jesus and “they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God’s wrath has overtaken them at last” (v. 16).<sup>12</sup>

### *Legal Restrictions and Forced Conversions*

The legal restriction of Jews began with the Code of Theodosius II in 438 C.E., which established Roman Catholicism as the only legal religion in the Roman Empire. Justinian I (527–565) stripped Jews of their basic rights and encouraged ecclesiastical laws forcing the conversion of Jews. The “church fathers” Chrysostom (c. 345) in the East and St. Augustine (354–430) in the West created the first influential theological rationale for Christian anti-Judaism. Chrysostom (Greek for “golden mouth,” referring to his effective preaching) called Jews idol worshippers who kill their enemies. They represent ultimate evil in their killing of Jesus, and they are like obstinate animals who “are fit for killing.”<sup>13</sup> Augustine contended that the Jews represented the fratricide of Cain (Gen 4:1-16) in their killing of Jesus, and are punished by being homeless unless they are converted—a rationale for enslavement and expulsion. A decisive reason for the growth of anti-Judaism was the rumor, propagated since the eleventh century in some French, German, and British areas, that Jews plotted physical harm to Christians.

The First Crusade (1095–1096) attracted a variety of anti-Semites, ranging from noblemen who wanted to rid the “Holy Land” of Jews, to pilgrims and bloodthirsty mobs stirred up by itinerant preachers to join the adventure. Characters such as Peter the Hermit and the poor knight Walter the Penniless joined the French aristocrats called by the pope to lead the crusade. When Jerusalem was conquered in 1099, most of its inhabitants were slaughtered.<sup>14</sup> Subsequent crusades disclose little, if anything, humane. Only St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1155) raised his voice against the fanatic crusaders, calling for patience and mercy because Jews were the “forefathers” of Christians.

Jews must not be persecuted . . . Ask those who know the Sacred Scriptures . . . [They] are for us living words, for they remind us always of the divine passion. They are dispersed into all areas so that, while they suffer the appropriate punishment for such a crime [deicide], they are everywhere the witnesses of our redemption . . . from whom we have our forefathers, and from whom we have Christ of the flesh.<sup>15</sup>

This is an exceptional statement in the midst of a history of contempt for the Jews. Bernard regarded the dispersion of the Jews as the “appropriate” punishment for the crime of deicide, rather than death, as all other medieval Christian voices demanded; he did not call the church “the new Israel” and acknowledged Jews as Christian “forefathers.” Thus, he is a mild breeze in contrast to the wild gusts of medieval anti-Judaism.

Church officials ordered Jews to gather for sermons designed for converting them and for refuting the Talmud as a heretical distortion of the Old Testament. The missionary campaign was led by monks and included occasional kidnappings of children for baptism. The well-known Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308), known for his subtle argumentation, defended such actions.

I believe that it would be a pious deed to coerce the parents themselves with threats and terror to receive baptism and cling to it thereafter. For even though they would not be true believers in their hearts, it would still be less harmful for them to be unable to keep safely their illicit religion than to be able to keep it freely. Their descendants, if properly brought up, would become true believers by the third or fourth generation.<sup>16</sup>

Here, cruelty is disguised in subtlety! Scotus approves the option that “the end justifies the means.” Thus, it is better for Jews to be hypocritical Christians (without faith in their hearts) than to be free to exercise their religion. In the end, there would be a new generation of brainwashed Jewish converts (“properly brought up”). This kind of Christian mission reminds one of similar tactics employed by twentieth-century Fascist and Communist dictators. This is a very unsavory lesson of church history.

In Spain, where Jews had become an integrated part of society—indeed, members of the elite—they were ordered to convert. Many did so by public baptism, but secretly remained committed Jews, known as *conversos*, nicknamed *marranos* (a derogatory term meaning “swine,” also used in Germany as *Judensau*, “Jewish sow”). The inquisition of the church relentlessly pressured the state to issue “edicts of expulsion.” Spain issued one in 1492, resulting in a mass expulsion.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, European Judaism continued to exist only in dispersion or in various ghettos, sometimes tolerated by Islamic authorities. Cruel expulsion and irrational demonizing, linked to fantasies and ethnic myths, made Christian Jew-hatred unique.<sup>18</sup> The church tolerated the scandal of vicious anti-Judaism as a defense of the Christian truth. As Pope Gregory the Great (540–604) put it at the beginning of the Middle Ages: “Though scandal be taken as truth, it is better to permit the scandal than to abandon the truth.”<sup>19</sup>

### *The Theology of Supersessionism*

This climate of suspicion, prejudice, and violence dominated the Middle Ages (1100–1500 C.E.) and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The theological core of medieval anti-Judaism was a “theology of supersession” that taught that God’s Old Testament covenant with Israel had been abrogated, or superseded, by a new covenant grounded in Jesus, the head of the Christian Church, the “new Israel.” Accordingly, all the divine blessings linked to a glorious future through a Messiah had been transferred to Christians who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. This view made Jews non-persons within the medieval society in which Christianity was the only acceptable religion. That is why Pope Innocent III decreed at the Twelfth (Fourth Lateran) Ecumenical Council of 1215 that Jews had to wear a visible yellow patch on their clothes in order to

be marked as outcasts living in ghettos.<sup>20</sup> Popular preachers propagated the “blood libel,” warning their listeners that the Jews continued to kill Jesus by stabbing consecrated hosts with a knife. As a medieval proverb put it, “Jews cannot exist or live without Christian blood.”<sup>21</sup> By the thirteenth century, Jews had been thoroughly demonized and dehumanized. The core of Jewish religious literature, the Talmud (a commentary on the Mosaic law, augmented by a collection of rabbinic wisdom), was “Christianized.” Fanatic revisionists even claimed that the plural Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, indicates Jewish belief in the divine Trinity!<sup>22</sup> Jews became the scapegoats for every disaster in nature or history, part of the trials and tribulations of the final age of the world. In 1348, Jews were attacked by Christian mobs for causing the Black Death, or plague. Black magic, sorcery, and usury became known as Jewish habits. Anti-Judaic handbooks were published by the church, among them the popular *Hammer against the Jews*, which appeared in Germany in 1513 as a companion to the equally popular *Hammer against Witches*, of 1487.<sup>23</sup>

The Renaissance and Humanism, usually portrayed as tolerant and enlightened movements dedicated to artistic imagination and the study of the past based on reliable sources, continued to see Jews as unwelcome outsiders. Erasmus of Rotterdam, an otherwise tolerant Humanist, viewed hatred of the Jews as proof of genuine Christian faith.<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther (1483–1546) moves from initial toleration to vicious hatred of the Jew—a radical transition! They are blood relatives of Christ, he wrote in 1521, closer to him than are the Christians—“we [Christians] are aliens and in-laws.”<sup>25</sup> They should be received cordially in Christian love and be able to do business with Christians—“if some of them should prove stiff-necked, what of it? After all, we ourselves are not all good Christians either.”<sup>26</sup>

When, in 1538, Luther heard rumors about Jews trying to convert Christians, he became angry and agreed with the verdict of medieval anti-Judaism that God had abandoned the Jews. He offered a theological conclusion about the intention of God concerning “his people.”

Since fifteen hundred years of exile, of which there is no end in sight, nor can there be, do not humble the Jews or bring them to awareness [make them Christians], you may with good conscience despair of them. For it is impossible that God would let his people be without comfort and prophecy so long.<sup>27</sup>

Luther violated his own theological method, namely, not to speculate about the “hidden” God. Only the “revealed” God is the subject of theology. Here Luther’s sharp mind became dull because he lost his temper. So he imposed a logical conclusion on God regarding the fate of the Jews: God deserted them because they did not convert. To make it worse, Luther’s frustration over Jewish resistance to conversion drove him to read the worst anti-Jewish slander spread by a Jewish convert, Anthony Margaritha’s *The Whole Jewish Faith (Der Ganze Jüdische Glaube)*, published in Augsburg in 1530. It was a collection of the worst items of medieval anti-Judaism. The author had left his prominent Jewish family in 1522 to become a “Lutheran.” A leading part in the collection was the story that Jesus was the third child of a Jewish whore named Mary and a blacksmith without a name. Margaritha’s literary filth provoked Christian and Jewish authorities in Augsburg to have him jailed and then expelled. It seems unbelievable that a scholar like Luther would fall for such nonsense, hook, line, and sinker. He even published his fury in 1543 in the famous treatise, “On the Jews and their Lies.” There, he advocated severe punishment of unrepentant Jews, ranging from the loss of their possessions to forced labor in camps. “We are at fault in not slaying them,” he fumed.<sup>28</sup> As it turned out, his views were largely ignored because most Jews had left Germany and public attention had shifted to the religious schism caused by Luther’s reform movement. Centuries later, the racist regime of Adolf Hitler used Luther’s treatise in support of its “final solution” of the Jewish problem, the Holocaust of the Jews.

John Calvin (1509–1564), the most influential reformer of the sixteenth century, viewed Judaism as part of a salvation history that begins with the Fall in the Old Testament and extends beyond the Bible into a new era of the people of God. In this sense, the Old Testament is already a “Christian” book because the Jews are already divinely predestined to be saved. Thus, he did not write against the Jews, but used Jewish law as part of a spiritual, “Puritan” foundation for Protestantism in Geneva. Calvin taught “the harmony of promises of the Law and the Gospel.”<sup>29</sup> “Calvin, and more generally Reformed Protestantism, reacted against Christian anti-Judaism whose intellectual emptiness they themselves demonstrated.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Toward the Final Solution*

Protestant history after the Reformation discloses some toleration of Judaism, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the influence of the Enlightenment.<sup>31</sup> Some elitist intellectuals became known as “philosemites” because they called for an end to the persecution of the Jews.<sup>32</sup> This trend continued into the nineteenth century, when liberal Protestants focused on the historical Jesus as the defining moment of Christianity. This meant that Judaism and Christianity could no longer be antagonists as they were in medieval anti-Judaism. A host of controversies arose among biblical scholars and church historians in Germany about the quest for the historical Jesus.<sup>33</sup> But although the irrational aspects of medieval anti-Judaism no longer played a role (there is no more talk about Jews as demons and host snatchers), anti-Judaism in general became part of a xenophobia that distinguished between superior and inferior cultures. Western Europeans, especially in Germany, France, and England, viewed Eastern Europeans as “primitive” and in need of civilization. On the other hand, Russian Jews accused Jews in France and Germany of having adapted to non-Jewish ways, thus becoming inferior Jews. German Jews retorted that they spoke the sophisticated language of famous philosophers and poets, such as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749–1832); they considered Yiddish (the dialect of “Eastern Jews”—*Ostjuden*) “as a nasal whining and crippled ghetto jargon.”<sup>34</sup>

A combination of Gobineau’s vision of the origin of races and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution (in his work *On the Origin of Species*, 1859) created a widespread “scientific racism” as the principal ideological source for a growing global xenophobia. Christian anti-Semitism linked this racism with the biblical account of the world’s nations as generations of descendants from Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen 9:18–10:32): Semites descended from Shem, African Hamites descended from Ham, and the Europeans descended from Japheth. Black Africans were singled out as the most inferior. Geographic distance created peculiar aspects of racism: The Chinese regarded Europeans as descendants of monkeys who never ascended to humanity, Arabs viewed Africans as stuck in animal existence, and Jews were seen as cunning.<sup>35</sup> Since Jews were forced into an itinerant style of life (“the wandering Jew”)<sup>36</sup> and

could only have liquid assets, they were rumored to be hard-hearted usurers—an accusation also spread by Christian anti-Semites during periods of economic depression and war. Moreover, the myth about the usurious “wandering Jew” was expanded to the myth about the Jew as shirker and war profiteer. After the great depressions caused by the crash of the stockmarkets in 1873 in Europe and in 1929 in the United States, bankrupt businessmen and politicians in Germany began to speak of an international Jewish conspiracy. Positive attitudes toward Jews had become rare. But Philosemitism persisted.<sup>37</sup>

Anti-Semitism blended well with the thriving, irrational racist mania in European society during the decades between the turn of the century and the rise of Russian Bolshevism and German Fascism. International congresses made the critique of Jews part of their agenda. This mania is well illustrated by the appearance of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* at the turn of the century, a forgery posing as a report of a secret meeting of Jewish elders in the Jewish cemetery of Prague plotting the take-over of the world.<sup>38</sup> Published in Russia, the unknown author claimed to be in the service of the Tsarist secret police that sought to justify Russian anti-Judaic policies. The publication quickly became an international best seller and part of the agenda of international congresses. German congresses were dominated by *The Protocols*, even though they were proven to be a forgery in 1921 and labeled “ridiculous nonsense” by a Swiss court.

In Germany, the anti-Judaic mania spread like a contagious disease, accompanied by a glorification of Germanic mythology, powerfully expressed in political propaganda and the music of Richard Wagner (1813–1883). Adolf Hitler called his regime the “Third Great German Empire” (*Drittes grossdeutsches Reich*), and predicted that it would last for a millennium and would subject the world to his rule. In fact, it lasted only about twelve years (1933–1945).<sup>39</sup> Satanic Judaism and godless Bolshevik Communism were targeted as the enemies that must be eradicated; they represented the inferior, impure non-Aryan races. Hitler went so far as to adopt the ancient Christian theology of supersessionism as the basis for his racism, dominated by anti-Semitism. “There cannot be two Chosen People,” he declared. “We are God’s people. Two worlds face one another—the men of God and the men of Satan.”<sup>40</sup> Statistically speaking, there was only a ten percent chance that the Jews could dominate

Germany and the world, since only half a million Jews lived among fifty million Germans, and only eleven million in a world population of three hundred million.

When the National Socialists (Nazis) established their regime in 1933, the Roman Catholic Church negotiated a “concordat” that guaranteed mutual nonintervention.<sup>41</sup> Hitler agreed not to draft priests into the armed forces, though Protestant pastors were drafted. Bishops and priests had to obey German laws and abstain from political activities. Bishops had to take an oath of allegiance to the German government, and

on Sundays and on authorized holidays in all Episcopal [headed by a bishop] as well as parish churches, their associated churches, and in the monastery churches of the German Reich as part of the service, in accordance with the precepts of the church liturgy, *a prayer [was] to be included for the well-being of the German Reich and folk.*<sup>42</sup>

It is one of the ironies of church history that the Roman Catholic Church agreed to offer its spiritual support to the openly racist, anti-Judaic ideology of the Nazis. Politically, the Concordat was a victory for Hitler since it eliminated any notion of resistance against him and his regime. Some Catholic bishops confessed at the end of World War II “that the Concordat had deceived the German Catholics and the whole world.”<sup>43</sup> It could also be said that Christians in Germany and Austria (Hitler’s native land) had been part of the solid, if not enthusiastic, support for the Nazi movement.

The Concordat made no reference to Jews. German violations of the Concordat, especially in regard to religious freedom, prompted Pope Pius XI in 1937 to issue an encyclical that could be understood as a critique of anti-Semitism. He rejected the myths of race and blood as contrary to revealed truth, and he declared that Christians were “spiritually Semites” as spiritual descendants from Abraham.<sup>44</sup> His successor, Pope Pius XII (1938–1958), hid behind a wall of diplomacy, unable or unwilling to condemn the killing of the Jews. Even when pressured by American and British envoys to the Vatican in 1942 to denounce the Holocaust, the pope continued to be silent about it. When pressured by his advisors, Pius XII did mention the Holocaust in his 1942 Christmas radio address—in twenty-seven words out of twenty-six pages of text—but the Jews were not mentioned.<sup>45</sup> The Holy See also refused to share information about

the Holocaust with Catholic resistance movements that were trying to save Jews. The reason for the papal silence, it has sometimes been suggested, might have been fear of a Nazi bombardment of the Vatican. But, since the days of the 1933 Concordat, Vatican policy was explicitly premised on seeking to maintain Catholic privileges for witnessing marriages, recognition of ordained persons, and celebrating sacraments in areas controlled by the Nazis.

The mainline German Protestant churches (Lutheran and Reformed) were divided in their reaction to the Nazi regime. “Cultural Protestantism,” combined with patriotism, blinded many church leaders and prevented them from making a clear, critical assessment of the regime. Leaders of a majority formed an alliance with Hitler in 1932, called “German Christians” (*Deutsche Christen*);<sup>46</sup> a minority, led by Martin Niemoeller (a heroic submarine commander in World War I who had become a Lutheran pastor in Berlin) organized an opposition to the regime in 1934 called “the Confessing Church” (*bekennende Kirche*).<sup>47</sup> The “German Christians,” led by Bishop Ludwig Müller, supported Hitler’s racist anti-Semitism: Jews represent “the danger of racial deterioration and bastardization. . . . Marriage between Germans and Jews is especially to be forbidden.”<sup>48</sup> Two famous theologians, Paul Althaus in Erlangen and Emanuel Hirsch in Göttingen, supported the rule of Hitler without, however, affirming racial anti-Semitism. But neither of them opposed the “Aryan Paragraph” in the new Nazi Constitution of 1933, which ordered the dismissal of all “non-Aryan” state employees—including the clergy who served in state churches. Hirsch even contended that Jesus was not Jewish, but Aryan.<sup>49</sup> Only the New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann and the theological faculty in Marburg opposed any application of the Aryan Paragraph to the church. The Confessing Church openly opposed the tyranny of Hitler, but was silent regarding the fate of the Jews in its “Barmen Declaration” of 1934.<sup>50</sup> Only one of their theologians, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, denounced Christian anti-Judaism. “An expulsion of the Jews from the west,” he declared, “must necessarily bring with it the expulsion of Christ. For Jesus Christ was a Jew.”<sup>51</sup> He assisted in the smuggling of Jews to Switzerland in 1941, and he was executed in 1945 for his participation in the 1944 attempt to assassinate Hitler. But, on the whole, most German Protestants either cooperated, or if not, were removed from office or drafted into the armed forces. When the churches

were reconstituted in 1945, church leaders issued a statement of guilt and penance, The Stuttgart Declaration of 1945. “We accuse ourselves,” the signatories declared, “that we did not witness more courageously, pray more faithfully, believe more joyously, love more ardently.”<sup>52</sup>

The large national Lutheran churches in Scandinavia rejected anti-Judaism. In an open Pastoral Letter in 1943, the Danish bishops protested against the planned deportation of the Jews. The people of Denmark saved the Jews from the Holocaust by various means, ranging from masquerading as Jews themselves by wearing the yellow patch on their clothes, to underground transportation to neutral Sweden.<sup>53</sup> The national Lutheran church of Norway, led by Bishop Eivind Berggrav, openly opposed a Nazi puppet government and supported organized armed resistance in 1941. But Hitler did not opt for a Norwegian bloodbath. He once again looked to the east, focusing on his invasion of Russia.<sup>54</sup>

### *Post-Holocaust Attempts at Reparation*

The Holocaust subsequently engendered penance and commitments to oppose any and all ways of anti-Judaism. “We ask all Christians to renounce anti-Semitism,” stated a resolution of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) in 1950, “and where it rises anew, to resist it vigorously, and to encounter Jews and Christians in the spirit of brotherhood.”<sup>55</sup> The Second Vatican Council composed a lengthy declaration on Jewish-Christian relations: Jews and Christians have a “common spiritual heritage,” the church deplors all displays of anti-Judaism, and it strives for better understanding of Judaism. There was a long debate over the continual Roman Catholic tradition of accusing Jews of deicide. In the end, the Council offered a cautious denial.

Even though the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Jesus, neither all the Jews indiscriminately at the time, nor Jews today, can be charged with crimes committed during the passion [of Jesus]. 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*.<sup>56</sup>

Pope John XXIII declared that “the Jews will remain most dear to God.”<sup>57</sup> But the present pope, Benedict XVI, did not act in a spirit of

toleration when he agreed to revive the Latin Mass which, unlike other versions after Vatican II, offers a prayer for the conversion of the Jews in the Good Friday liturgy.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, You do not refuse Your mercy even to the Jews; hear the prayers which we offer for *the blindness of that people* so that they may acknowledge the light of your truth, which is in Christ, and *be delivered from their darkness*.<sup>58</sup>

Intensive Jewish and ecumenical protests moved the pope to reformulate the prayer, omitting the reference to Jewish “blindness” in the context of praying for all people to convert to Christ.

Hindsight suggests that Christian attitudes to Jews are characterized by a trajectory of contempt, ranging from demonizing rhetoric to physical persecution. But even after the Holocaust, anti-Judaism is still part of the agenda of some churches and groups. They still teach the “theology of supersessionism,” being active in a mission to the Jews. Some Jewish converts to Christianity, organized as “Jews for Jesus,” are the most zealous missionaries to the Jews. In 1972, Moshe Rosen, a born Jew who converted at age seventeen to become a Baptist minister, founded the group. According to their mission statement (distributed in pamphlets), they want “to make the messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to our Jewish people worldwide.” They try to fulfill their mission in street rallies in many countries around the globe. While their zealous activities are opposed by Jewish organizations, they have some support from mainline churches that desire the conversion of the Jews.

## **Apostolic Refutation**

The contemptible, dangerous historical trajectory of Christian anti-Judaism could have been avoided if the biblical testimony about Judaism had been heard and accepted. Although the New Testament contains anti-Jewish polemics, there is no decisive biblical evidence for any Christian anti-Judaism. Rather, the evidence supports the conclusion that there need not be a Christian mission for the Jews since they are and remain the chosen people of God, even after Christ. The evidence is summarized and persuasively argued by the apostle Paul, the most significant voice of the first Christian generation. Using laser-like logic, he supports his

stance by using texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, the only “Bible” that Jesus and his followers would have recognized. When one looks at all the passages cited, one becomes convinced that the detailed biblical evidence is the irrefutable basis for the conclusion that Christian anti-Judaism is a contradiction in terms—an oxymoron.

Paul’s life and work are portrayed in the first history of the Christian movement recorded by a Greek convert, Luke, a physician (Col 4:14), in two parts: the events from the birth of Jesus to his ascension (The Gospel According to Luke), and the growth of the Christian mission, focusing on Paul and ending with his stay in Rome (The Acts of the Apostles).

Paul was the son of a Pharisee who spoke Greek and was a Roman citizen. Paul, too, was such a citizen by birth and, named Saul, was educated in Jerusalem to be a Pharisee. Quite zealous, he hunted down Christians and committed them to prison; he approved of the killing of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 8:1-3). After a sudden conversion on the road to Damascus, Saul became Paul the apostle (Acts 9:1-19, 13:9). Thus the relationship between Judaism and Christianity became quite personal.

When Paul began preaching the gospel in Damascus, the Jewish residents felt betrayed and plotted to kill him; he escaped under the cover of darkness (Acts 9:23-25). Barnabas, a converted Jewish priest, introduced him to the young church in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27) and to its leaders, Peter and James, the latter being one of the brothers of Jesus (Matt 13:55). Paul quickly became involved in lively debates with the Greek residents (called “Hellenists”) about the gospel. Soon, they were attempting to kill him (Acts 9:29). Paul escaped and, after some traveling, ended up in Antioch with the largest Christian community other than the one in Jerusalem. There, he and Barnabas were commissioned to undertake a longer missionary journey to Greece (Acts 13:2-3).

After their return to Antioch, some Jewish Christians appeared and told the Gentile Christians, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Luke records that Paul and Barnabas “had no small dissension and debate with them” (Acts 15:2). Paul rejected the requirement of circumcision, though he would encounter it again later in his missionary journeys. He told the Galatians, “In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). They were “called to freedom” *from* self-righteousness *to* mutual love,

summed up in the single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:13-14). In this sense, “there is no longer Jew or Greek” or any other distinction (Gal 3:28). Here Paul invites the Galatians to focus on the notion of sin. Circumcision had its own value, of course (Rom 3:2). It marks Jews as God’s chosen people. But they, like the rest of humankind, did not remain righteous, because righteousness cannot be obtained by law alone; it is obtained by faith. “Both Jews and Greeks are under the power of sin” (Rom 3:9). God reckoned faith, not the works of law, to Abraham as righteousness—before he was circumcised (Rom 4:9-10). He is the prime example of faithfulness.

The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised. (Rom 4:11-12)

After Christ, Paul declared, there is the “circumcision of Christ” in baptism. Through it, one “is dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of the flesh” and made alive by God who erases the record of unfulfilled legal demands (Col 2:11-14). Paul himself felt free enough in Christ to “become all things to all people” to save some, “a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to Gentiles” (1 Cor 9:20, 22). He even had Timothy (“my loyal child in the faith,” 1 Tim 1:2) circumcised when he took his mission to Jewish towns. Timothy, whose mother had converted from Judaism, was to pose as a Jew “because of the Jews who were in those places” (Acts 16:3).

But Paul’s stance created sharp debates between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Christian Jews contended that Gentiles must adopt Jewish customs, such as circumcision. Gentile Christians adopted the theology of supersessionism and argued that Jews had forfeited their divine election through the rejection of the Messiah, Jesus. Consequently, the divine promise of salvation had been transferred to Christians, and Jews must convert in order to be saved.

### *The Council of Jerusalem*

Two decades after the ascension of Christ, the lively young Christian church was threatened by schism. To avoid it, Paul and Barnabas were

sent to Jerusalem to discuss the matter with the leaders there, especially the Christian stance regarding Mosaic law. After a brief welcome and a report about the successful Pauline mission to the Gentiles, conservative Jewish Christians in the assembly, identified as members of the sect of the Pharisees, declared: “It is necessary for them [the Gentiles] to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). The leaders—the apostles and elders—called a formal meeting to deal with the issue, later known as the first of many church councils, “the Apostles’ Council of Jerusalem,” in c. 50 C.E. (Acts 15).<sup>59</sup>

Peter spoke first. He reminded his audience that he had been chosen to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and that God gave them the Holy Spirit, just as it had been given to Peter. “In cleansing their hearts by faith he [God] made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:9). Peter referred to the spectacular conversion of the Roman military leader, the centurion Cornelius: “The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even among the Gentiles” (Acts 10:45). “Why are you putting God to the test,” Peter asked the hard-line Jewish Christians in the assembly, “by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?” (Acts 15:10-11). As experts in the Mosaic law, Peter surmised, Pharisees should know that circumcision was only required of infants on the eighth day after their birth (Lev 12:3). Occasional circumcision of adults is reported as a sign of solidarity between feuding families united by marriage (Gen 34:21-24). Such solidarity may have been deemed a sufficient condition for outsiders to live with Jews without a pledge to live like one born Jewish, who had to obey all the laws and rituals. Jewish law required circumcision as the proper initiation into the covenant, but for Jewish Christians the requirement seemed unnecessary. That is why Peter concluded his speech by contrasting faith in the law, i.e., legalism, with faith in spiritual freedom: “On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they [the Gentiles] will” (Acts 15:11).

The assembly listened to the reports of Barnabas and Paul about their successful mission to the Gentiles. James responded, praising Peter’s joyful experience with the Gentiles whom God has made “a people for his name” (Acts 15:14), and he quoted Scripture in support of a church consisting of both Jews and Gentiles. “It is written, ‘I will rebuild the

dwelling of David . . . so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called” (Acts 15:16-17; Isa 45:21; Jer 12:15; Amos 9:11). James concluded with a decision recommended to the council for adoption: “We should not trouble these Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to *abstain from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood*” (Acts 15:19-20; italics added). The four recommendations are parts of the ancient Law of Moses (the Torah) for the tribes of Israel (Lev 17–18) and for “aliens who reside among them” (Lev 17:13).

James may have intended to remind his listeners of specific laws regarding aliens and strangers. Resident aliens should not be oppressed, but loved because Jews were strangers in Egypt (Exod 23:9; Deut 10:19); “cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice” (Deut 27:19); and “the Lord watches over the strangers” (Ps 146:9). This was a way to define converted Gentiles, as well as the young international Christian church, as being an integral part of the “chosen people” of Israel. James rejected any demand to make the Mosaic law a condition for salvation.<sup>60</sup> But he asked Gentile Christians not to offend Jewish Christians by adopting four abstentions and by showing respect for obvious ethnic differences. They are visible signs that non-Jewish Christians are joined to the ancient covenant with God, “a light to the nations” for the glory of God (Isa 42:6).<sup>61</sup> Although the glory of God is revealed in the Torah, it is fully manifested in Jesus Christ who “is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4).

The first recommendation—abstention from things contaminated by being sacrificed to idols—deals with the Jewish sacrifice of animals to “goat-demons” outside the camp, defaming the tabernacle of God (Lev 17:3-4, 7). Paul encountered similar sacrifices that Gentiles made to demons (1 Cor 10:19-21). James asked Gentiles to abandon such dangerous rituals to show solidarity with Jewish Christians.

The second recommendation—abstention from fornication—protects the stability of communal life from widespread practices, such as incest, adultery, and bestiality (Lev 18:16-23). This applies also to aliens residing within the Jewish community (Lev 18:26).

The third recommendation—abstention from eating animals that have been strangled, that is, died naturally or having been killed by wild

animals (Lev. 17:15)—prohibits the eating of blood. Blood must be properly drained from the carcass; otherwise, in eating the meat, one becomes “unclean” (Lev 22:8).

The fourth recommendation—abstention from eating blood—explains why it is “unclean.” Blood signifies life, and drinking it would mean to feed on live bodies. “For the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the meat” (Deut 12:23). Humans are not to be like animals that suck blood from living creatures.

James seems to have chosen these four aspects of Jewish law to make it possible for Jews to feel more comfortable with Gentiles. Obedience to some rules regarding food and sex might make them more welcome as “aliens” in the Jewish communities. James hoped that synagogue attendance by Gentiles (Paul usually took Gentiles there, Acts 13:13-14) might even make them appreciate the Mosaic law more. After all, it “has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues” (Acts 15:21). James disagreed with the Pharisees that the admission of Gentile “aliens” to the Jewish community required the circumcision of male adults. He judged the four recommendations as sufficient. He also could have listed other Mosaic laws shared by the non-Jewish world and contained in the Decalogue, such as the prohibition of murder, theft, and other uncivilized actions. But he opted for a reasonable compromise.

The assembly decided (“with the consent of the whole church,” Acts 15:22) to send Judas and Silas along with Paul and Barnabas to Antioch, carrying a letter with the recommendations of James as the decision of the assembly. The letter also addressed the mission of Barnabas and Paul “who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). Then the decision was cited.

It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials; that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. (Acts 15:28-29)

The “essentials” are actually “non-essentials” because they are based on the uncompromising conviction, expressed by Peter, that salvation comes only through the grace of Christ: “We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). This is *essential*.

Anything else is *non-essential* for salvation. Consequently, Christians should tolerate, indeed honor, some ethnic religious customs and rituals, as long as they are not viewed as necessary for salvation, be they circumcision or regulations regarding food and sex.

### *Jews and Christians Together*

Paul presented his systematic reflections on the role of Judaism in the history of salvation in his Letter to the Romans (9–11), probably written shortly after the council in Jerusalem in 57 C.E., perhaps in Corinth.<sup>62</sup> Many converted Gentiles had concluded that the Jews’ “No” to the gospel also implied God’s “No” to the Jews—a view later known as a supersessionism, that is, the notion that all the ancient divine Jewish blessings had been transferred to Christians. That is why Christians no longer viewed Jews as the chosen people of God. They must choose Christ in order to be saved.

Paul begins his reflections with the recognition of the power of evil that is subject to divine judgment. No one can earn salvation from this judgment by trying to appease God through efforts to obey the law. God promises salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. This is the “gospel.” “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’” [Hab 2:4] (Rom 1:16-17). “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:2-3). Reliance on laws alone only creates an endless struggle between good and evil.

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. . . . Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom 7:15-19, 24-25)

Paul regrets that his own people did not extend their faith to Christ as the Messiah and Savior, as he did. He even would be willing to be “cut

off from Christ” if thereby his own people would gain salvation (Rom 9:3). They have a long tradition of being the people of God from whom emerged the Messiah, Jesus, “according to the flesh” (Rom 9:4-5). But, Paul argues, they also were not always faithful, be it in their obedience to divine laws or in their attitude to God. The Old Testament testifies that the true Israelites are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, “the children of the promise,” not “the children of the flesh” (Rom 9:8-9). God remains faithful to them, as God assured Moses when he interceded for his stiff-necked people: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (Exod 33:19; Rom 9:15). The issue, therefore, is not whether the *Israelites have earned God’s salvation* by their works of the law, but whether *God remains faithful* to them, be it in wrath or mercy. God is free to choose any people, as Hosea was told: “Those who were not my people I will call my ‘my people’” (Rom 9:25; Hos 1:9, 2:23). In short, God “justifies the ungodly” even if they do not do the works of the law (Rom 4:5). As a result, Gentiles attain righteousness through faith, not through the law, as Jews advocate (Rom 9:30-31). The law has become their “stumbling stone”—the notion that zealous obedience of the law would earn righteousness.<sup>63</sup> Righteousness is a gift of God through faith. The prophet Joel linked it to the Last Day, when God calls those chosen to survive for a never-ending future without sin, death, and evil. Christians believe that Christ has already promised such a future; he “is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes” (Rom 10:4). Jews do not yet have such a faith and continue to rely on the law as the link to a future, the Last Day, when the law is no longer needed. But in the end, “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved’” (Rom 10:12-13, quoting Joel 2:32).

Paul wants the non-Jewish Christians in Rome to know that God has not rejected Israel, even though God “foreknew” that they would become unfaithful, indeed would kill divine prophets and demolish divine altars. They had to be disciplined by Elijah who was told by God to gather a remnant of seven thousand who remained faithful (1 Kgs 19:14, 18; Rom 11:4). Paul sees a remnant also in his own day, different from the Jews to whom “God gave a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear down to this very day” (Isa 6:10; Rom 11:8). David’s

prophecy is similar when he sang of “darkened eyes and their backs forever bent” (Ps 69:23; Rom 11:9). Paul even offers the theological speculation that through the sins of the Jews, salvation came to the Gentiles.

So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their stumbling salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! (Rom 11:11-12)

### *Root and Branch*

Turning his attention to the Gentiles, Paul tells them that his own mission to them is related to God’s way with Israel. Gentile Christians are rooted in the election of Israel. They are not like the branches broken off an olive tree, “a wild olive shoot.” On the contrary, they are grafted into it to share the rich root of the olive tree. “Do not boast over the branches,” Paul tells the Gentile Christians. “Remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you” (Rom 11:18). That is why Jews and Gentile Christians belong together.

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you will also be cut off. And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for *God has the power to graft them in again*. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches *be grafted back into their own olive tree*. (Rom 11:22-24; italics added)

But how will the “natural branches,” the Jews, be “grafted back,” that is, become once again the “people of God?” Paul’s answer is that it is a “mystery,” but with some clues pointing to a conclusion.

I want you to understand this mystery: *a hardening of heart has come upon the part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*. And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written [Isa 59:20-22], “Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish

ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.” As regards to the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. Just as *you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy* because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, *by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy*. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. (Rom. 11:25-32; italics added)

Paul offers some clues or “interconnected elements” that, though controversial, shed some light on the mystery.<sup>64</sup> First, many Jewish hearts have been “hardened” against the covenant that promises delivery from sin; presumably it is God’s hardening, just as God hardened the heart of Pharaoh and of everyone he chooses (Exod 4:21; Rom 11:7). Second, the hardening may last until all Gentiles have joined the Jews, as Jewish prophets had proclaimed (Isa 2:3), perhaps even until the end-time. Third, since both Jews and Gentiles have been “imprisoned in disobedience,” there is no distinction between them; punishment and salvation are the same for both.

Paul’s theological reflections clearly exclude any notion of a “conversion,” a “proselytizing,” or a “mission to the Jews” as the conditions for Jewish membership in a predominantly Gentile church. As Paul sees it, Gentiles abandon their religion when they accept the gospel (1 Thess 1:9-10), but observant Jews who accept it do not change religions but reconfigure the religion they already have. Together, both groups constitute something new, a new ‘people’ united by a shared conviction about the Christ-event as God’s eschatological act.<sup>65</sup>

These clues enlighten part of the mystery that, however, should be solemnly respected, indeed praised, as “the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” whose judgments and ways are “unsearchable” and “inscrutable” (Rom 11:33). Such God-talk—theology—sees the role of Judaism in the history of salvation from the viewpoint of biblical Wisdom theology.<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, God is to be worshiped rather than explained. Paul also employs Greek Stoic rhetoric at the end of his theological reflections, a poetic praise of a mysterious God, a liturgy of reverence, as it were, recalling Jewish prophecy and Greek philosophy.<sup>67</sup>

For who knows the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? For from him and through him and to him are all things.<sup>68</sup> To him be glory forever. Amen. (Rom 11:34-36)

Paul offers a clear, well evidenced, and persuasive argument for a common bond between Jews and Christians. They are bound together in the history of salvation. There is no need for a “mission to the Jews.” They are, and they remain, the chosen people of God. Christians are engrafted in them through Christ, the incarnate will of God. Self-righteousness, attributed to the Jews by Christians, always comes home to roost and contaminates the nest.

### **From Penance to Justice**

The wise counsel of the apostles’ assembly in Jerusalem and its strong support through the reflections of the apostle Paul should evoke a powerful repentance among Christians around the world, a true “change of mind” (from the Greek *metanoia*, “conversion”)—the mandate of Jesus (Mark 1:15). There must be penance about Christian anti-Judaism, the product of prejudice, slander, and hatred. Like poisonous gas from the chimney of a chemical plant whose owner is unconcerned about ecological damage, anti-Judaism has polluted the faith of Christians throughout centuries of church history. When medieval Christian, dehumanizing, and demonizing anti-Judaism was secularized in Adolf Hitler’s cruel, cunning “final solution,” the church was finally pushed to do some penance in the face of the dangerous contamination of its heads and members.

The French Jewish scholar Jules Isaac has called the core of Christian anti-Judaism theology the “teaching of contempt.”<sup>69</sup> He identifies and analyzes three aspects of this teaching: (1) that the dispersion of the Jews is a punishment for crucifying Jesus; (2) that because of the degenerate state of Judaism at the time of Jesus, Christianity inherits the divine promise of salvation originally made to the Jews—“supersessionism”; and (3) that the Jews committed the crime of deicide. Although much official ecclesiastical penance has been done in varying degrees after World War II and the Holocaust, such anti-Jewish doctrines can still be heard in some Christian quarters as reasons for any arrogant “mission to the Jews.” A critical analysis of them, based on scrutinizing hindsight, refutes the three “teachings of contempt,” and an exposure of their historical

roots eliminates such theological causes. “It is not history that must come to terms with theology; on the contrary, it is theology that must come to terms with history.”<sup>70</sup>

### *Dispersion*

Jews were already dispersed before the Common Era, beginning with the continuing destruction of the Jewish kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E., and the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. On the other hand, Jews were not dispersed when they were punished by the Romans who destroyed their temple in 70 C.E. Again, they were a united, settled community when they began a bloody revolt against Rome in 132 C.E. (the second Judean war) and were defeated by Emperor Hadrian a few years later. A sizable Jewish community lived in Jerusalem during the first Christian crusade in 1099; Crusaders reported that they had trapped many Jews in the synagogue after setting fire to it.<sup>71</sup> The continual dispersion of the Jews began in the Middle Ages and extended into the twentieth century, when arrogant churches and tyrannical rulers tried to rid the world of Jews. To view such dispersion as an action of God is blasphemy.

Critical hindsight also discloses solid evidence that the early Christian tradition regarded dispersion as a way of life. Based on the example of Abraham, first-century Christians “confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth seeking a homeland” (Heb 11:13). Just as Abraham was residing as a stranger and alien in foreign territory, looking for a home (Gen 23:4), so do Christians, longing for the heavenly city that God has prepared for them (Heb 11:16). The Christian “promised land” is a never-ending life with God beginning at the end of time; the Jewish “promised land” is a state in Israel, as modern Zionists have demanded and still defend it as a homeland for dispersed Jews. Thus, the notion of dispersion identifies Christians better than Jews.

### *Supersessionism*

Supersessionism claims that a new divine covenant was established in Christ, replacing the old one because of self-righteous Jewish legalism. What has been called “the charm of supersession” became popular in

the middle and late second century when Gentile Christians dominated the church.<sup>72</sup> They saw the replacement of the old covenant with a new one through Jesus in the biblical prophecies about the Messiah, in the prediction of the destruction of the temple, and in the announcement of the trials and tribulations of the end-time (Mark 13:1-8; Heb 10:9). They concluded that the gospel was meant for the Gentiles (Luke 2:32) and they assigned the embarrassing messianic prophecy of a triumphant rule over Israel's enemies to the second coming of Jesus. This view had become official doctrine in the western, medieval Roman Catholic Church. It is again one of the ironies of church history that Roman Catholicism reaffirmed its medieval stance, even during the time of the Holocaust. Pius XII declared, in his Encyclical Letter of June 29, 1943, that the New Testament took the place of the Old Law [Old Testament] that had been abolished.<sup>73</sup> In 1943, Nazi death camps for the Jews were no longer a secret.<sup>74</sup> After the Holocaust, the Second Vatican Council rejected its theology of supersessionism in 1965: "The Church acknowledges that in God's plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets."<sup>75</sup>

It is inaccurate to view Judaism as driven by messianic expectations. Such expectations do not dominate the Jewish theological perspectives. Even in the first two centuries of the Common Era, when messianic speculations flourished, Diaspora Judaism was hardly affected by it. Community patterns focused on the commandments of God, not on messianic expectations; those expectations were generated by Christians who related them to Jesus and his second advent. "Whatever conclusions Christian theologians reached, they assumed that their historical victory gave them the right to define Judaism in Christian terms."<sup>76</sup> The theology of supersessionism has no solid biblical evidence to stand on. It is refuted by the principal apostolic testimony on Jewish-Christian relations, provided by the leaders in Jerusalem, Peter and James (Acts 15) and, above all, by Paul (Rom 9-11). Accordingly, the relationship between the church and Israel is to be viewed in an eschatological context: God "hardened the hearts" of the Jews toward the Christian gospel to make them negative witnesses, as it were, to God's unsearchable ways that will be revealed at the end of time. This is God's "eschatological reservation." The final divine judgment on Christian-Jewish relations is reserved until the end-time. Both church and synagogue are called to tell the world that God,

not anyone else, will finish the work of salvation. That is why Christians cannot claim to be the “new Israel” in the sense of having received all the blessings of the “old Israel.” According to Paul, the Jews are and remain the people of God, even though they do not accept Jesus Christ as their messiah. Why this is so, only God knows.

Some theological rethinking has been done after the Holocaust.<sup>77</sup> A variety of theologians in the United States issued “A Statement to our Fellow Christians” in 1974. They were assisted by the Commission on Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches and by the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The theologians listed fourteen propositions for study and discussion in Christian communities: 1. The church is rooted in the life of the people of Israel. 2. Christians and Jews depend on each other for mutual enrichment in the light of the western world’s far-reaching crisis of values. 3. Faith in Christ does not abrogate the covenant relationship of God with Israel. 4. The quest for Christian unity and the tragic reality of the Holocaust, together with the conflict in the Middle East, make urgent a reconsideration of the relationship between Christians and Jews. 5. The rampant anti-Judaism of the past must be faced with penance in the present. 6. Christian churches must confront the problems associated with the state of Israel, the question of the Palestinians, and the problems of Arabs, especially the refugees in the Middle East. 7–9. Christians must support the state of Israel as a nation that has a moral and legal right to exist as an alternative to dispersion. 10–14. The lessons of history must be used for a ministry of reconciliation and as a guard against the virus of anti-Judaism.<sup>78</sup>

### *Deicide*

The very idea of “killing God,” or deicide, is unintelligible to both Christians and Jews who respect history and common sense. Nevertheless, Christians accused Jews of crucifying Jesus and, since he is the second person of the Trinity (“true God from true God”),<sup>79</sup> they killed God. The idea of deicide has been traced to Christian theological speculations about the relationship between the story of the divine command to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen 22:1-19), and the story of the “sacrifice” of the Son of God incarnate in Jesus who was crucified. The “old covenant”

between God and Israel is grounded in Abraham's unconditional faith, involving infanticide; and the "new covenant" between God and Christianity is grounded in God's willingness to sacrifice "His Son." Moreover, the new covenant, established in Christ, ends all human sacrifice and makes unconditional faith in Christ the means of salvation from sin. Again, this "teaching of contempt" becomes invalid in the face of critical hindsight. Jewish authorities lacked the political power to execute Jesus. The Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, reluctantly consented to it when an angry Jewish mob agreed to blame themselves for any charges of injustice ("his blood be on us and our children," Matt 27:25). Accordingly, not *all* Jews demanded the execution, and Jesus was known only to a minority of Jews as "the Son of God."

The apostles accused the Jews of having Jesus killed "in ignorance" (Peter, in Acts 3:17). Thus, it was homicide through ignorance rather than premeditated deicide, a charge made popular in the second century when Greek syllogistic speculations invaded the church (the killing of the "Son" implies the killing of the "Father"). They were suppressed by the dogma of the Trinity (defined in the Nicene Creed of 325 C.E.), which calls for doxological praise rather than theological speculation. God is to be praised rather than explained. One can only conclude that, on the basis of historical evidence and normative ecumenical tradition, the crime of deicide and its link to Judaism makes no sense at all. Such claims ignore historical reality and violate common sense. That is why the persistent charge of Jewish deicide in formal Roman Catholic teaching was removed from magisterial doctrine. The Second Vatican Council declared in 1965 that "what happened in His [Christ's] passion cannot be charged against all Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today . . . The Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if it followed from the Holy Scriptures."<sup>80</sup>

True change of mind, or repentance, involves a thorough historical "reality check"—i.e., viewing things as they really are. From such a perspective, Christian anti-Judaism is an arrogant construction of spiritual superiority based on prejudice and fear, making unconverted Jews the scapegoats for the evils in the world, in the same way that the medieval western church blamed Jews for everything that went wrong. After the Holocaust, there needs to be a sustained Christian-Jewish dialogue about evil.<sup>81</sup>

The Hebrew Scriptures define evil as idolatry, that is, as the most serious violation of the First Commandment of the Decalogue (“I am the Lord your God . . . You shall have no other gods besides me”). This definition appears in the biblical account of the Fall when the serpent tempts Eve “to be like God” (Gen 3:5). Although Christians and Jews may radically disagree on what their faiths affirm, they can unite on what constitutes evil according to the story of the Fall: the desire to be like God. Following the example of the Jewish Christian Paul, they should stop speculating about the reasons, the means, and the timing of each other’s salvation from the “original sin” of playing God. Rather, in the mean (and sometimes “mean”) time of earthly existence, they should converge in the common task of standing guard against the evil of idolatry—be it in the realms of politics, or morals, or even of religion. Adolf Hitler was neither the first nor the last to view himself as a god who could challenge the Jewish Christian Lord of history. Hitler and his followers created the Holocaust, which has become part of common history. That is the most obvious reason why Christians and Jews must now, more than ever before, share sentry duty against evil, even though they remain divided in their religious affirmations. After all, they share a common obligation for life in a world of sin, evil, and death.

God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to *do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.* (Mic 6:8; italics added)

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matt 22:37-40; italics added)

### *Detoxing Anti-Judaism*

Post-Holocaust theologians admitted that the church had misread Paul for centuries, thus allowing anti-Judaism to contaminate Christian minds.<sup>82</sup> But theological reflection on the relationship between the gospel and Israel has to move beyond Paul and take up the question of Jewish-Christian co-existence. Paul had a vision of Jews and Christians as one

community before God at the end of time. But what should this relationship be before the Last Day? Paul lays the theological groundwork for an answer when he speaks of the power of faith.

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. (Rom 3:28-30)

Since both Jews and Christians are made right with God, or “justified,” by the unsearchable and inscrutable ways of divine love, they can work on being right with each other as earthly creatures sharing a common destiny of salvation. Here they can use their minds, or reason, to be as creative as possible without worrying whether or not God approves, for they are liberated from the speculation, doubts, and anxieties of having to please God by what they do, by “works of law.” Human reason can be fully employed to develop ways in which faith is active in love of others. Such love is the antidote, as it were, against a toxic spirituality of self-help which, when zealous, spreads the poison of a dangerous egotism and self-righteousness. Seen from this perspective, reason has a greater *ethical* function than a *theological* one—namely, to facilitate the best possible love of neighbor without any speculations about motives and merit. Social ethics discerns and develops the means achieved between different groups bonded by history. Post-Holocaust Jews and Christians know better than anyone else how hard it is to create rules for finding “just,” balanced ways for a common life in a penultimate yet still evil world. Ethicists speak of a “golden rule,” or an “ethics of reciprocity,” summarized in the saying, “Do unto others as you wish to be treated.” The rule exists, in one form or another, in all major religions and cultures.

Jews and Christians can accept the religiously neutral notion of justice as “order” through obedience to laws for the common good. These laws facilitate interpersonal communication and a balance of rights as well as a fair distribution of goods, and when the balance is threatened and rights are violated, there must be restitution, including punishment for violations of laws by common consent.

Justice creates the best possible balance for life in a penultimate world. The results of just deeds are the same regardless of religion, culture, or any other differences. Consider the following situation:

Someone is drowning and is pulled out of the water by three swimmers: a Christian, a Communist, and a Hindu. They proudly proclaim that their religious convictions motivated their good deed. The action was the same, though the confession of faith made it a Christian, a Communist, or a Hindustani deed. “It makes no difference who saved me,” said the survivor. “I just wanted to be pulled from the water.”

When specific ethical efforts are exhausted, new and different attempts must be made, knowing that final solutions are only possible when all penultimate ways have run their course prior to the Last Day. All attempts should at least include realistic programs for the common good.<sup>83</sup> In a world plagued by myriad ways of injustice, then creative, stubborn, and enduring struggles for justice must become part of life in a world marked by unspeakable crimes against humanity.

Anti-Judaism represents a toxic spirituality in its view and interpretation of the Old Testament. Fear, prejudice, and superstition have overruled clear thinking and critical scholarship. It is incredible how Christian biblical scholars like St. Augustine, Martin Luther, and others could ignore the authority of Scripture represented by the apostle Paul! After all, he, unlike almost anyone else, could have used his conversion to reject his Jewish past. Yet he thought through the problem of Jewish-Christian relations, concluding that one should live with the mystery of God’s ways rather than with a syllogistic theology of supersession. Consequently, Paul advocates a reconciled diversity between Jews and Christians as the people of God in Christ on the way to a common future with the spiritual heirs of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A denial of such apostolic wisdom inevitably leads to blasphemy with all its terrorizing consequences.