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FORGOTTEN FACTS IN THE HISTORY OF JEWISH CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

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Fr. Krause, in his first essay for Faith & Reason, gives an overview of the history of Jewish-Christian relations. A great deal of this information has been ignored and must be recalled if we are to build a future based upon mutual respect and understanding.



IN RECENT TIMES MUCH HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE HISTORICAL FAILURES OF Christianity in its dealings with Jews. Very little is ever said about Jewish animosities and provocations or the larger social, economic, and political context within which such failures occurred. Meanwhile, anti-Christian secularist media presentations of the subject abound, and it is surely no help to the promotion and defense of living and authentic religious faith that their one-sided and biased presentations go unchallenged. At this point we need a brief historical overview that will emphasize a number of oft-forgotten facts critically important to any fair handling of the subject. It is, of course, primarily by focusing on the positive elements in the history of Jewish-Christian relations that we can hope to build a more constructive relationship for the future, and it is in support of John Paul II's will to foster mutual respect and appropriate co-operation among Christians and Jews that I offer the following brief historical overview.¹ It focuses on a number of often deliberately ignored, but extremely significant facts from our past.

ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Anti-semitism, in the contemporary meaning of the term as racial hatred, is not to be found in the New Testament. Rather we encounter what is essentially an "in house dispute," carried on between Jews. The objectionable passages sometimes designated as anti-semitic are spoken by Jews to fellow Jews. St. Paul who makes the sharp statement of I Thessalonians 2:14-15, is the same Paul who indicates in no uncertain terms his deep love for his own people in Romans 9-11, especially 9:3ff. and 10:1-2. Paradoxically, Matthew and John, the two most criticized of the evangelists in this regard, are also the most Jewish in tone and theology, and were of course themselves Jews. Indeed, if all negative statements about Judaism are to be labelled "anti-semitic," then, absurdly, we will be forced to designate the prophets of Israel as anti-semitic.

When Jews speak in this manner to Jews, the issue is not one of racial hatred of the Nazi variety, but an argument about truth, a matter of counterclaims concerning truth. It is important to see that both parties to the dispute claim to be the legitimate descendent and representative of the same Jewish tradition and Scriptures. The first Christians by their own description of what they had come to believe understood that their "new faith" was but the fulfillment of their earlier Jewish faith, and in no sense a departure from it. Fellow Jews were wrong in refusing to enter

into this fulfillment, refusing to allow that the Grace of God have its necessary universal impact and be extended to all nations as in due course it had to be. Recent statements of Cardinal Ratzinger, for which he has been unfairly criticized, simply reiterate this basic claim of the New Testament.

Quite clearly, the role of Jewish leaders in the death of Jesus is nowhere a predominant focus of attention. The theologies of the New Testament explicitly relate that death to the sin of all men.² St. Paul speaks' emphatically against any argument that the Jews as a people are under a special curse of God: "As regards election, the gifts and call of God are irrevocable . . ." (Rom. 11:28-32). St. John likewise insists: "Salvation is from the Jews" (4:22). The early Church owes its existence to the Jews - They are the root that has given life to the branches (Rom. 11:16-24). This article of faith has been repeated by the popes many times: "We are spiritual semites, the spiritual heirs of Abraham." The Church has never regarded herself as anti-thetical to the faith of Israel. Rather we understand Christianity to be the first stage in the culmination of the Jewish expectation, the beginning, but not all there will be, of the fulfillment of God's promise. There remains then a very valid sense in which Jews and Christians can appropriately pray together, "Thy Kingdom come."

Christianity remains different, of course, scandalously different from the Jewish viewpoint, from Judaism. The supreme obstacle, then as now, was found in the teachings and person of Jesus - his Messianic claims, and the fact that in the words of the High Priest, "he made himself the equal of God." If Jesus lived and died a Jew, he at the same time lived and died as one conscious of possessing a personal authority and significance unparalleled in the history of Israel. This remains the "folly to Gentiles and stumbling block to Jews" it has always been. Yet, indisputably Jesus comes as a Jew to Jews, with a Jewish message, and gathers around him Jewish followers who eventually bring the Christian grace and proclamation to others, though as Paul insists "to the Jew first, and than also to the pagan" (Rom. 1:16; 2:10). Jesus very decidedly came with a message of Jewish fulfillment meant to be "a light for Gentiles, but also to the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Thus, Christianity rightly understood is not the cancellation of Judaism, but at the heart of all that Jews hold dear. It cannot be rejected as being incompatible with true Jewishness at least in the mind of its own adherents - and this down to the present

day.

THE JEWISH PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

From the beginning Jewish-Christian relations are under a sign of contradiction. They begin with the crucifixion of Jesus, the martyrdom of Stephen in the Temple precincts, the resolute and ongoing persecution of Paul, the death of the two Jameses and similar pursuit of Christians throughout the empire for almost three centuries. Barnabas' death (c. 60 A.D.) at the hands of Jews in Cyprus is unanimously reported by early hagiographers. Nero's persecution of Christians was without doubt instigated by Jewish accusations. The motive imputed by St. Clement of Rome was "jealousy and envy."³

In the decade of the eighties, with the specific purpose of driving Jewish Christians out of the synagogue, a "benediction," which was in reality a curse, was added to the recitation of the Eighteen Benedictions (Shemoneh Esreh). The version found in the Cairo Genizah, probably the oldest form of the text, is explicit in its reference to the Nazarenes.⁴ In other words, Jewish Christians were treated with contempt by fellow Jews and were to be deliberately driven out of the Jewish community. It is understandable that the actions taken against Jewish Christians would have an impact on the Church as a whole. To curse Jewish Christians is to curse all Christians says Justin Martyr when writing in 150 A.D.: "in your synagogues you curse all who have become Christians." A little later he adds, "At the moment you cannot use violence against us because of those in power, but whenever you can you do."⁵



St. Justin Martyr

The second century witnessed a broadening of the struggle, misunderstanding, and bad feeling. Christians outpaced Jews gathering converts. Aroused by Christian claims and successes, it is clear that Jews continued to take an active role in the imperial persecutions of Christians. Justin Martyr returns again and again to the point. Tertullian (c. 180) labels Jews "the seed-plot of all the calumnies against us," and called the synagogues of his day "fountains of persecution." Origen (c. 250)

charges Jews with falsely reporting Christians guilty of cannibalistic practice and sexual orgies. Commenting on the words of a Psalm, he claims that the Jews “rage against Christians with an insatiable fury.”⁶ In 117 A.D. under Trajan Jews participated in the death of St. Simeon, bishop of Jerusalem. During his revolt (A.D. 132-135) Bar Kokba massacred the Christians with the blessings of the Rabbis. In A.D. 155 at Smyrna, when St. Polycarp was condemned to be burned, Jews gathered wood for the fire “as is usual with them.” In Smyrna a century later, St. Pionius, burned under Decius, addressed the Jews that derided him before his death in the following terms:

I say this to you Jews ... that if we are enemies, we are also human beings. Have any of you been injured by us? Have we caused you to be tortured? When have we unjustly persecuted? When have we harmed in speech? When have we cruelly dragged to torture?⁷

There were in addition numerous contemptuous references to Christ and to Christians within rabbinic literature. A particularly egregious example would be the so called “Toledot Jeshu.” It purports to be the story of the life of Jesus. It is a kind of farce, a mocking distortion of the gospel story, and goes back to the second and third centuries, extant in nearly a dozen different versions. Although scholars admit there is no historical worth to the narrative, it provided many generations of Jews with their dominant impressions of Christianity, and reflects nothing but cruel disdain. It circulated along with formal letters from the Sanhedrin at Jabne to the Diaspora concerning the attitude to be adopted vis a vis Christianity. Three of the Fathers - St. Justin, Eusebius, and St. Jerome - indicate the content of the letters: Jesus, a charlatan, was killed by the Jews. His disciples stole the body. Jews should have absolutely no dealings with His followers. The decisions at Jabne, promulgated by these letters, clearly constituted a formal and definitive excommunication of Christians from the Synagogue.⁸

For the most part Christian response to early Jewish attacks was moderate. Condemnations are generally tempered with a note of sadness and hope for reunion. In the *Didascalia*, a liturgical compendium, the Jews are referred to as our brothers, and Christians are instructed to fast for them during the days of the Jewish Passover. The most complete Christian Tract on the Jews of the second century was the *Dialogue with Trypho* of St. Justin Martyr. It is a model of a kind of Jewish Christian dialogue that would appear frequently throughout history.

He draws heavily on Old Testament texts to affirm the messiahship of Christ and concedes to the Jewish Law an important preparatory role. Similar treatises were written by Tertullian, Hippolytus, Cyprian, and Origen. Origen, in his *Against Celsus*, writes both a critique of Judaism and a rebuttal of Celsus’ *True Account*. In that text Celsus, a pagan philosopher, places in the mouth of a Jew the anti-Christian arguments current among contemporary Jewry, many of which were most disrespectful. Christians, Origen argues, respect the heart of the Law more than do Jews.⁹

THE MIDDLE AGES

Unfortunately, some recent studies choose to ignore what the Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide acknowledges is the predominant fact of Medieval Jewish Christian relations, that “Medieval Jews as a rule were protected by the popes.... The papacy - with rare exceptions - remained Jewry’s staunchest and often only bulwark against wanton violence and bloodshed.” There are well over 100 papal Bulls and Letters of Protection.¹⁰



In 590 Gregory I, in the aftermath of the enormous disorder spawned by the barbarian invasions, set the basic tone and policy for succeeding generations forbidding “that the aforesaid Hebrews be burdened or afflicted contrary to the order of reason.” He insisted that they be “permitted to live in accord with Roman statutes and order their activities without hindrance.” Acting on a complaint received from the Jewish community in Rome, Gregory sent a response that incorporates the formula “Sicut Judaeis non . . .,” destined to recur endlessly in papal documents concerning Jewish rights and disabilities throughout the Middle Ages:

Just as license ought not to be presumed for the Jews to do anything in their synagogues beyond what is permitted by law, so in those points conceded to them, they ought to suffer nothing prejudicial....¹¹

The incident which provoked the appeal to Gregory involved an illegal expropriation of a Jewish Synagogue and guesthouse. The bishop responsible was made to pay for the buildings, guaranteeing that the Jews

“should in no way appear to be oppressed, or to suffer an injustice.” As for the books and ornaments that had been taken, these were to be restored “without question.” The lawful rights of Jews to their property, including their cult objects, must be respected. On another occasion Gregory would instruct the Bishop of Naples that the Jews of the city should not be disturbed in holding their solemnities, long carried out by them and by their forebears. “Let them enjoy their lawful liberty,” he says. It is useless to forbid their feasts and holydays in the hope that this will lead to their conversion. Far better to show them that what we say is true from their own Holy Writ, “ex eorum codibus.”

Between the pontificate of Gregory the Great and the Crusades at the end of the eleventh century, papal intervention in the affairs of Jews seems to have been relatively rare, and confined to a few localized conflicts. Spain was the exception, but Spain in many respects is a special case. The Church in Spain knew violence in the name of faith from an early date. The Visigoths, on the heels of the Vandals, were Arians, quick to repress dissent by force. Catholicism had barely survived that threat to its existence, when the Islamic armies crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and not many years later the Pyrenees. Indeed, the Moslem invaders seemed to threaten all of Gaul when they faced Charles Martel at Tours in 732. To expel them was to require a Christian counter attack, prolonged through seven embittering centuries. Throughout much of this time Spanish Christians were persuaded that the Moslem invader had been and was being assisted by Jews. It was primarily for this reason that the Jews of Spain were subject to varying degrees of control. The decrees of the Council of Toledo in 694 reflect this in stating: “As for the Jews dwelling within the frontiers of our Kingdom, they have entered into a plot in order that they might act as one with the Moslems against the Christians. . . . They have tried to bring disaster to the Fatherland and to all the population. . . .” Similarly, the *Anales Bertinianos* attribute the loss of Barcelona to the Moors in 852 to Jewish treachery: “Jews having played the traitor, the Moors captured Barcelona, and nearly all the Christians have been killed, and the city devastated.” It should come as no surprise then that Spain, with her perennial civil war, would be the scene of some fairly severe restrictions, and of a goodly number of “forced baptisms.” What is striking is that throughout this sad and very protracted tragedy not a single papal text can be found that would support any tactics which would violate the basic integrity and freedom of con-

science of Jews. Individuals might on occasion force Jews into the Church, or argue that it is just to do so, but not one pope, as Edward Synan insists in his study, has been found among their number.¹²

At the dawn of the High Middle Ages, Innocent III in a *Constitution for the Jews* reaffirmed the teaching of Gregory I and earlier popes in the most formal of ways:

We, out of the meekness proper to Christian piety, and keeping in the footprints of Our predecessors of happy memory, the Roman Pontiffs Calixtus, Eugene, Alexander, Clement, and Celestine, grant that ... no Christian ought to presume apart from the juridical sentence of lawful authority to injure the person of Jews, or with violence to take away their property. Moreover, in the celebration of their feasts, no one ought disturb them in any way, with clubs or stones, nor ought anyone try to require from them or to extort from them services they do not owe. In addition, We decree, in an effort to block the wickedness and avarice of evil men, that no one ought to dare mutilate or act disrespectfully toward a Jewish cemetery. . . . If anyone shall attempt to go against these decrees, he shall be punished with the penalty of excommunication, pending equitable satisfaction.¹³

This Constitution was confirmed and reissued at least twenty three times down to the end of the fifteenth century. It was meant to serve as a firm foundation on which to base appropriately fair and just relations between the Jewish and Christian communities. Within its basic juridical framework there were both periods of relative peace and prosperity as well as of serious tension.

In 1146 at the time of the second Crusade, St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, himself the official preacher of the Crusade, remained true to the noblest traditions of the papacy in insisting that both in the matter of preparing for and in conducting the Crusade “Jews must in no way be persecuted.” “Whoever touches a Jew,” he said, “so as to lay hands on his life, does something as sinful as if he had laid hands on Jesus himself.” It would be difficult to improve on the reasons that Bernard gave as being the particular warrants of the Jewish people for Christian good will: “From them,” he recalled, “has come the Law of the Promise, from them the Patriarchs who are our fathers as well as theirs, from them, according to the flesh, has Christ Himself come forth.” At other

times the preaching of Saint Bernard could sound harsh. Jews would complain that he was antagonistic in terming their understanding of the Scriptures “ox-like.” Bernard would respond, “But read Isaiah, and you will hear what goes farther than Ox-like! I am much milder than the prophet.” In this context it is important to note that Bernard was even harsher with the failures of fellow Christians:

This world has its nights, and they are by no means few. The world itself is almost totally a night. Jewish disbelief is a night. The wickedness of heretics is a night, and a night too is the fleshy or bestial way of life led by many Christians.¹⁴

There were, of course many excesses associated with the Crusades, but even Gregory IX, who excelled in restrictions on Jewish moneylending, would respond forcefully when Jews had recourse to him for protection of their basic human rights. He reissued in his turn the traditional papal Constitution for the Jews, “Sicut Judaeis non. . .” In the midst of serious social turmoil and preparations for a Crusade he would send a detailed letter to the hierarchy of France insisting:

Although the disbelief of the Jews must be re-proved, it is nevertheless, useful and necessary for Christians to have dealings with them, for they possess the image of our Saviour, they have been created by the Creator of all, and they must not be attacked by his creatures, especially those who believe in Christ. It is the Lord himself who forbids it!¹⁵

Gregory concludes with a line resonating with Gospel simplicity and a sense of fairness: “That brand of kindness ought to be shown to the Jews by Christians which we would wish shown Christians who live in foreign lands.” Following the promulgation of this letter no less than fourteen bishops and archbishops as well as the King himself would receive the pope’s vehement protests against “wonton and unheard of cruelty” by Crusaders and against obvious fraud with respect to the payment of debts owed Jewish moneylenders.

Another major sore spot in the history of Jewish Christian relations occurred during the terrors of the Black Plague. Many who lived through the period were stupefied by the magnitude of the disaster. They lacked the medical science that would permit them to understand and cope with the causes and transmission of the disease. Some terrified by the suddenness with which it

killed the populations of Europe responded in desperate and irrational ways. In this context there arose tales to the effect that devotees of witchcraft and Jews were putting potions in the waters and fountains, and that this was the reason that the pestilence was spreading so. On this account many Christians as well as Jews, although innocent and blameless, were burned, slaughtered, and otherwise mistreated. Clement VI did his best to exonerate Jews from responsibility for the plague. A disease that kills Jews, he pointed out, could hardly be the result of an anti-Christian Jewish plot. In this context he also reaffirmed the rights of Jews to their life, religious freedom, property, and finally to baptism, should they seek it freely. Unfortunately, papal efforts did not always succeed, but it can hardly be denied that many and serious efforts were made to uphold fundamental human rights and dignity in these matters.¹⁶

It is commonly acknowledged that the legislation of the Fourth Lateran Council marked an historical lowpoint in Christian Jewish relations during the Middle Ages. This legislation, however, is partly a reaction not only to the Moslem-Jewish threat to the very existence of Western Christianity, but also a reaction to the notoriously unjust dealings of Jewish moneylenders especially in rural and agricultural regions. Yet despite the evident and serious peril to Christian Europe’s survival nowhere does the legislation condone or encourage violence against the persons or properties of “alien peoples.” It was meant, of course, to regulate not only Jews but Moslems as well and reads in part:

Inasmuch as Christian people are oppressed by the exaction of usury, and desiring to make some provision, lest they be cruelly burdened, we legislate by synodal statute that if in the future Jews, under any pretext whatsoever, extort heavy and immoderate usury, the partnership of Christians with them be withdrawn until they shall have made satisfaction in an effective way for any immoderate burden. We enjoin princes to inhibit Jews from imposing such great burdens in , the first place.... We renew what the Council of Toledo legislated forbidding that Jews be able to hold public office, since they are usually hostile to Christians.¹⁷

In sum, elementary fairness requires that the popes of the middle ages and their policies be studied in the context of their own times, respecting the full political, social, as well as moral and religious conditions then prevailing. The popes of any single generation must be

compared with their contemporaries: as Pius XII might be juxtaposed with Churchill, Einstein, and Stalin for a rough evaluation of his life and its ethical and human import. So Innocent III is better understood when we remember that his world was that of Frederick II, St. Francis of Assisi, and John Lackland. Gregory I is illumined by comparison with Clovis, Theodoric, and Boethius. It would be easy to dredge up the worst examples of persecution over two millennia of history, and let that be a principle focus. It would be just as easy and much more constructive I think to remember the positive aspects and moral highpoints of the 2000 year old rivalry between Jews and Christians with a view toward building a better future on the achievements of the past. But even when one feels impelled to recall the less fortunate incidents, it would be unfair to lift statements or policies of past leaders entirely out of their historical, social, and political context as is often done.

RECENT HISTORY AND THE HOLOCAUST

In the modern world the Catholic Church has been pursued and persecuted every bit as viciously and insistently as have Jews from the time of the French revolution in 1789 through Napoleon, Bismarck, and Cavour, from Lenin and Stalin through Hitler and Mussolini, even to the “Know Nothings” and nativists in America.”¹⁸ It is rarely remembered these days that the “Bible” of the Nazi creed, Alfred Rosenberg’s book, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, was almost as anti-Christian and anti-papal as it was anti-semitic: “The pope is a medicine man, the dunce of our age, ... papacy is servitude.... the Christian Jewish plague must perish.” Still our primary focus with respect to Jewish Christian relations might well be the Holocaust since it looms so large in the modern imagination as the epitome of moral evil and of human reaction to it. It should be added, however, that there are many very apt and sadly neglected parallels with the Ukrainian Holocaust, where Stalin deliberately starved 10-14 million Ukrainian Catholics and Hitler’s genocide. Even though there was warning enough, many around the world did nothing to assist or rescue them. It is understandable that their children might question the apparent indifference and unconcern of their

brothers and sisters, including their Jewish brothers and sisters, and this down to the present day.¹⁹

The Jewish scholar Pinchas Lapide writes, “in an endless flood of sermons, allocutions, and encyclicals Pius XI was an unrelenting and outspoken opponent to all forms of racism.” In 1928 he clearly reiterated the fundamentals: “The Holy See has consistently protected Jews against unjust vexation. Indeed, it always condemns rancour and conflict between peoples, but it particularly and unreservedly condemns hatred against the people once chosen by God, the hatred that commonly goes by the name of anti-semitism.” His Christmas Message of 1930 is likewise typical: “If there is in Christianity the idea of a mystery of blood,” he writes, “it is that not of a race opposed to other races, but of the unity of all men in the heritage of sin.” He taught this in the context of a ringing condemnation of “egoistical and hardened nationalisms.”²⁰ In 1936 in the encyclical “Mit Brennender Sorge,” and then again in 1938, he vigorously protested German and Italian race laws. “The human race,” he said, “is but a single and universal race of men. There is no room for special races.”

Whoever transposes Race or People, the State or Constitution, the Executive or other elements of society from the scale of earthly value to make them the ultimate norm of things, and deifies them with an idolatrous cult, perverts and falsifies the divinely created order of things.... Only superficial minds can fall into the error of speaking of a national God, and of making a mad attempt to imprison within the frontiers of a single people, or within the pedigree of one single race, the God and Creator of all peoples.... The Gospel of Jesus Christ admits of no myth of blood and race.²¹

The Vatican Radio on his behalf frequently asked its listeners to pray for persecuted Jews, and decried racism as “a gross error” which “denies Catholic doctrine.” On one particularly memorable occasion he would say to pilgrims in Rome, “Anti-semitism is a movement with which Christians can have nothing to do. I tell you it is impossible for a Christian to take part in anti-semitism. Through Christ and in Christ we are the spiritual



Auschwitz-Birkenau entrance

progeny of Abraham. Spiritually we are all Semites.”²²

It is undeniable that Pius XI’s abhorrence of racism and the misapplication of “genetic science” was shared by his Secretary of State, Eugenio Pacelli, who in fact wrote many of his discourses, and was the one who was to succeed him as Pius XII. Of 44 allocutions Cardinal Pacelli would make on German soil as Papal Nuncio, 40 contained attacks on Nazism and condemnations of its doctrine. “Germanism,” Hitler called it, “Neo-paganism,” countered Pacelli. “Racial struggle” thundered the Austrian Colonel, “fraternal love and the universal kinship of mankind,” responded the archbishop from Rome. Indeed, German and Italian fascists did everything they could to oppose Pacelli’s election clearly taking him to be the one “who stood behind all of Rome’s attacks on National Socialism.” In sum, as Lapidé has stated, “The teaching of the Church was clear enough for anyone inclined to listen.” Neither the 10 Commandments nor the Sermon on the Mount stood in need of papal re-ratification. Those who were truly Christian at heart had all the moral guidance they needed. The devotees of National Socialist science, who, like their Marxist counterparts, mocked at Divine Law and flouted the teachings of Jesus, were not likely to heed any additional appeals from Rome.²³

In the end, actions always speak louder than words, and it is precisely here that the efforts of loyal Catholics in union with the pope excel. Indeed, under his leadership, Italy despite its Fascist alliance with Hitler, became a foremost haven for Jewish refugees throughout the war years. That the racial laws were never really implemented in Italy was due largely to the repeated interventions of the Vatican. Over 85% of the Italian Jewish population were rescued by Christian clerics, monks, nuns, and other Catholics. They were hidden in monasteries, convents, and ecclesiastical buildings all over Italy. It appears that Pius XII dealt personally with at least 200 refugees during the war years. Another 6000 or more obtained passports and visas on papal orders. Many were able to reach Latin America. In addition, the Italian zones of occupation in France, and in Axis occupied Yugoslavia and Greece, were hotbeds of rescue activities.²⁴ The head of Italian Jewry’s wartime Jewish Assistance Committee, Dr. Rafael Cantoni, who subsequently became the President of the Union of all Italian Jewish communities stated, “The Church and the papacy have saved Jews as much and in as far as they could save Christians. . . . There would have been many more victims had it not been for the effica-

cious intervention of Pius XII.” The former Chief Rabbi of Rome during World War II, Eugenio Zolli, says at the end of his account of the events in Rome in 1943 and 44:

Volumes could be written on the multiform works of Pius XII, and of the countless priests, religious, and laity who stood with him throughout the world during the war.... No hero in all of history was more militant, more fought against, none more heroic than Pius XII in pursuing the work of true charity.... and this on behalf of all the suffering children of God.²⁵



Led and inspired by Rome, rescue efforts by the Church throughout other parts of occupied Europe were equally impressive. Slovakia was one of the first countries to come under Hitler’s domination. It became a “Reich-protectorate” in 1939. On September 9, 1941, race laws were enacted. Two days later the papal Nuncio went to see the Slovak president to stress “the injustice of these ordinances which also violate the rights of the Church.” The Slovak episcopate sent a collective protest to the President, and when these appeared to be ineffective, a pastoral letter was read by episcopal orders in all Slovak churches. The letter clearly condemns the “lamentable actions against thousands of innocent fellow citizens, due to no guilt of their own, but only a result of their racial descent.”²⁶ After a continuous and unrelenting string of protests and interventions the Slovak Prime Minister was driven to say, “. . . the Slovak clergy has rarely demonstrated such zeal for the interests of its own people as it now evinces for the Jews.” In a second pastoral letter read in all churches on March 21, 1943, the bishops proclaimed, “Aware of our responsibility before God. . . we firmly raise our voice against the measures with which masses of our faithful and other fellow citizens are wronged in their personal liberty.” Large numbers of priests and peasants proceeded to conceal and rescue fugitive Jews at great personal risk. Some 25,000 Jews were able to hide, many in churches and monasteries, others in farm houses or in the woods. Leon Poliakov concludes, “Judging from German diplomatic reports of the time, the cessation of the deportations in the summer of 1942, and the survival of nearly twenty five percent of the Slo-

vakian Jewish population must be attributed to Vatican intervention.”²⁷

Similarly, in Roumania as soon as the first racial laws were promulgated, the papal Nuncio Monsignor Andrea Cassulo issued a protest on behalf of the Church. Roumania was to become the only country besides Germany itself which would implement all the steps of Hitler’s original plan. From the very beginning the Church intervened in every possible way to resist their implementation, and this in a situation where only 8% of the population was Roman Catholic, and where the Church itself was subject to harsh repression. In July of 1942 central Church archives were forcibly invaded by police demanding access to all records. The Chief Rabbi of Roumania, Dr. Alexander Shafran, continued to have regular meetings with the pope’s representative. He, states in his Diary, “At this moment the Catholic Church is the one and only body which can intervene usefully. Nuncio Cassulo continues to bring every problem we ask him about to the Government. It sometimes happens that he appears before them twice on one day.”²⁸ In September of 1942 as a result of such incessant intervention the deportations ceased, and in spite of several strong Gestapo and SS protests, they were not resumed. Many Roumanian Jews were saved. In addition, substantial assistance was channeled through the good offices of the Nuncio to suffering and displaced persons. Indeed, at the end of the war and three weeks after the liberation of Roumania the Chief Rabbi did not hesitate to declare:

For two long years, when the deportations of Roumanian Jewry were decided and about to be carried out, the high moral authority of the Nuncio saved us.... He prevailed so that the deportations should not take place. Our thoughts turn more than ever with respectful gratitude to the Sovereign Pontiff, who has done so much for Jews in general, and to his representative who has acted so superbly on behalf of the Jews of Roumania. The generous aid and support of the Holy See has been decisive. Roumanian Jewry will never forget this.²⁹

In France, the Archbishop of Toulouse drew up a memorable protest in response to the first round-up and deportation orders for Jews. At Pius XII’s express direction the *Osservatore Romano* and Vatican Radio repeated and elaborated on the Archbishop’s protest for four consecutive days. Three times scheduled transports were cancelled, and the French government vigorously protested what it called “interference in its internal af-

fairs.” From that point on, however, French bishops and religious leaders kept up a steady of protest and resistance. Typically, the Bishop of Montauban declared:

My dear brothers, scenes of indescribable suffering and horror are abroad in our land. Jews are being subjected to the most barbarous treatment.... I indignantly protest in the name of Christian conscience, and proclaim that all men are brothers created by God. The current anti-semitic measures are a violation of human dignity and of the sacred rights of the individual and of the family.³⁰

A joint protest written by Cardinal Suhard of Paris and signed by all the bishops of France in July of 1942 stated:

We are profoundly shocked by the mass arrests and the inhuman treatment meted out to Jews. In the name of humanity and of Christian principle we resolutely condemn this violation of the inalienable rights of man.³¹

The Chief Rabbi of Paris acknowledged, “Catholics are deeply affected by the tragedy which has befallen the people of Israel.” Subsequently, in a Pastoral Letter the primate of France instructed all French Catholics to refuse to surrender Jews to the authorities, and to hide or shelter them when possible. Priests, nuns, and laity were already engaged in a massive rescue effort which saved tens of thousands of Jewish lives.

Similarly, in neighboring Holland and Belgium the bishops acting in consort with the pope repeatedly denounced the barbarous treatment and deportation of Jews. Strikes broke out in Amsterdam, and within three days spread to six other towns. Over 18,000 workers walked off their jobs paralyzing railways, shipyards, and other basic industries. Martial law was declared and within three days the strikes were broken. In their aftermath the official *Israel Digest* had to admit that the protest actions provoked an even more severe enforcement of anti-Jewish measures. Still, encouraged by their bishops, families continued to risk everything, including their lives, by hiding Jews in their attics, roofs, walls, and cellars, like those who sheltered Anne Frank’s family, and were themselves sent to concentration camps. Thousands of unsung heroes in this way saved some 25,000 of Anne Frank’s brothers and sisters. Yet, tragically in the end, despite much loud protest and heroic action, more Jews were deported from Holland than anywhere else in the West - some 100,000 or nearly 80% of the total. Lapidé

suggests that it was this failure which in part caused Pius XII to pursue from that point on an aggressive rescue and shelter campaign for Jews in lieu of further formal or public protest.³²

Jewish leaders in Madrid credited the Spanish government under Francisco Franco with a direct role in the rescue of nearly a quarter of a million Jews, more than any other neutral or allied government. There remain discrepancies regarding the total number of those assisted, but such discrepancies are not hard to understand. Wartime conditions made record keeping a haphazard process at best. Because of bombing raids several of Spain's embassies lost records which could have provided more precise information about those issued visas or otherwise placed under Spain's protection. Moreover, no one at the Pyrennean border was assigned to actually count the large numbers of Jews streaming into Spain. Many entered clandestinely.³³ A large part of Spanish aid was in the form of visas issued to thousands who used them to go to places other than Spain especially Latin America or North Africa. Western media sources, for example, commonly make much of Raoul Wallenberg's rescue work in Hungary in 1944. Yet, the two most authoritative Jewish sources on the subject, those of Jenő Levai and Raul Hilberg, credit the Vatican and Franco's Spain with having played the larger and more critical role on behalf of rescue efforts in Hungary.³⁴ After 13 years of research into the matter, the American Jewish Rabbi and scholar, Chaim Lipschitz, concluded that

the "pattern of unmistakable humanitarian aid" by the Spanish government during the war remains unmatched among western and neutral governments many of whom were in much more fortunate political and economic circumstances. It is also clear that Franco did what he did in the context of very serious political and personal risk. Sadly, in the eyes of the world, Lipschitz says, neither he nor Spain has ever received the credit they deserve. Summing up this history, Max Mazin, president of the Jewish community in Madrid, has stated:

Spain should occupy an outstanding place among those who during the most tragic hours in the history of Judaism extended a hand. It is difficult to list all the Spanish actions which helped to save lives, but in regard to those generous acts, the name of Spain should be engraved in Gold letters.³⁵

No people of Europe suffered the ravages of Nazi persecution more atrociously than Poland. In six years over 6 million Polish citizens were killed. The war began with a secret pact between Hitler and Stalin to divide the country between them. Hitler wanted to create "Lebensraum" for the German race in the East. Stalin's plan to deport a million and a half Poles to Siberia was only temporarily interrupted by the Nazi invasion of her erstwhile ally. Along with Jews, Nazi racial and genetic science categorized all Slavs including Poles as sub-human and racially inferior. Hitler's orders to solve "the Polish problem" entailed largely successful plans to annihilate the clergy, the nation's intelligentsia, and its military and political leadership. They

were murdered by the thousands in concentration camps and other killing centers. It would not be inaccurate to characterize the whole of Poland in this period as being one big "concentration camp." It was utterly sealed off and isolated. Pius XII protested repeatedly, but to no avail.³⁶

A number of additional important historical and cultural factors complicated rescue efforts on behalf of Jews in Poland.

First, over the centuries Poland had admitted large numbers of refugee Jews from other European nations. By the beginning of the war Polish Jews constituted the largest community of Jews in Europe representing 10% of the total population. By contrast, the Jewish population of Denmark was a mere two tenths of one percent. More importantly, most Polish Jews were culturally unassimilated and easily distinguished from the dominant population, which made hiding them virtually impossible. The overwhelming majority (80%) spoke Yiddish as their



Plaque at Auschwitz

native tongue. Only 12% spoke Polish. They dressed differently, attended separate schools, and shared radically different habits and cultures along urban/rural lines. Lastly, the penalties for any kind of assistance to Jews were much more severe in Poland than in any other part of occupied Europe, and this for the full duration of the war. The Nazis, moreover, spread malicious lies among the rural populace to the effect that Jews were carriers of a deadly typhus disease in order to justify their roundup and segregation. Despite all of this, heroic efforts were made to aid and rescue Jews. Thousands of priests, nuns, and others standing with them were able to save as many as 50,000 Polish Jews from 1940-45. Those who lived through the period insist that the magnitude of this effort must be measured against the fact that “it often took as many as twenty five rescuers to shelter, feed, clothe, and hide a single Jewish child from the all-pervasive claws of the Nazi murder machine.” Each of these risked not only their own lives and security, but often that of their families or neighbors as well. In the end Polish Jewry suffered the effects of pseudo-scientific racist madness more grievously than any other people. What also needs remembrance is that tens of thousands of would be rescuers perished along with them.³⁷

Prior to the spring of 1944, Hungary’s one million Jews stood in no need of foreign intervention or protection. In Jenő Levai’s words, “While the Germans had moved to destroy all the Jews of central Europe by 1944, the million-odd Hungarian Jews were a virtually untouched island under the protection of Regent Horthy and the Kallay Government. On October 15, the Germans took control of Budapest, arrested Horthy, and put the puppet Szalasi in power as “Fuhrer of the Nation.” Four days after the German invasion, the Apostolic Nuncio asked for an audience with the newly installed Premier, and “from that day on never ceased from intervening against the inhuman character of the anti-Jewish legislation.” He worked tirelessly with the diplomatic representatives of Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Switzerland to rescue imperilled Jews.³⁸ Jenő Levai, the foremost Jewish authority on the situation in Hungary concludes, “Over 20,000 passports had been issued by the papal Nuncio - on the average of 500 a day ... In the autumn and winter of 1944 there was practically no Catholic Church institution in Budapest where persecuted Jews did not find refuge.” More than 100,000 Budapest Jews, and some 200,000 in all of Hungary were rescued. The Vatican’s intervention in this great enterprise was pivotal. Indeed, the Undersecretary of the Interior, Laszlo Endre, would

complain to the SS General Winkelmann, “We must state that as far as aid to Jews is concerned, priests and clergymen are in the first rank. Protection and intervention has never been on such a large scale.” Several Bishops denounced the anti-Jewish atrocities, and tried to stop evacuation procedures in their locales.³⁹

In the light of the above facts Lapidé comments on the curious inclination of some, 40 years or more after the events, to criticize “the silence” of Pius XII.⁴⁰ It was abundantly clear to all by 1942-45 that public protests by the pope would generally make the fate of victims worse. Not even Jewish leaders at the time, who were in repeated and close contact with the Vatican, were recommending public protests as in any way useful or helpful. Some, like the Italian Ambassador to Berlin, or the Polish Cardinal of Cracow, were begging the pope to be more careful in his pronouncements so as not jeopardize rescue and relief efforts. Latter day critics of the pope, Lapidé suggests, are indulging in the worst kind of “self-aggrandizement and sanctimoniousness.”⁴¹ It is particularly ironic that such accusations be directed against “the one man who probably did more to rescue Jews than any other person alive at the time.” Typically, one of the 7000 Jews who lived through the Roman round-up in October of 1943, and safely reached Spain, thanks to the massive rescue efforts of the Church would say:

None of us wanted the Pope to speak out openly. We were all fugitives, and we did not want to be pointed out as such. The Gestapo would only have increased and intensified its pursuit. If the Pope had protested, all the attention would have been turned on Rome. It was much better that the Pope kept silent. We all felt the same, and today we still believe that.⁴²

CONCLUSION

At the end of his careful study Pinchas Lapidé concludes that “The Catholic Church, under the pontificate of Pius XII, was instrumental in saving as many as 860,000 Jews from certain death at Nazi hands.... This figure exceeds by far those saved by all other churches and rescue organizations combined. Moreover, this achievement stands in startling contrast to the unpardonable foot-dragging and hypocritical lip-service of those outside Hitler’s reach, who certainly disposed of far greater means to rescue Jews including the International Red Cross and the Western democracies in general.” After recounting statements of appreciation from a variety

of prominent Jews and spokespersons after the death of Pius XII, Lapide states, “No pope in history has been thanked more heartily by Jews. ... Several suggested in open letters that a Pope Pius XII Forest of 860,000 trees be planted in the hills of Judaea” in order to perpetuate fittingly the memory of the late Pontiff, and those who following his lead kept faith with the Gospel imperatives.⁴³

The above history with its heroic effort to assist and rescue Jews during the Holocaust, at a time when the very existence of the Church itself was seriously imperilled, ought to be remembered, respected, and affirmed. It remains a stable foundation on which we can build

for the future. That future is clearly fraught with many threats to the dignity of man and our chances for peace on earth. Among the more insidious and demonic of such forces is an aggressive atheistic materialism, dogmatically enforced in the East (Marxism), but powerfully and very subtly at work in Western nations. It is out to destroy religion in defiance of the basic dignity of all men. It often poses as a secularist or “scientific materialism” as did the earlier Nazi and Stalinist menace. If we are to successfully resist it, people of deep and authentic religious faith must stand together, as we always have, as we did in the war years, and let the heroism of our forefathers instruct and sustain us.



NOTES

1John Paul II, “On Jews and Judaism: 1979-1986,” (Washington: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1987).

2The Council of Trent again reiterated in the most formal and unequivocal of ways mankind’s global responsibility for the crucifixion as over against the so called “deicide charge” against the Jews.

3Clement of Rome, “Letter to the Corinthians,” in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1948), vol. I, chapters 4 and 5.

4W. Horbury, “The Minim and Early Jewish/Christian Controversy,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 33 (1982), pp. 19-61.

5Justin Martyr, “Dialogue with Trypho,” in *The Fathers of the Church*, vol. 6, chapters 16, 17, and 96.

6Tertullian, “Ad Nationes,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishers, 1973), vol. III, pp. 109-157. Also, “An Answer to Jews,” pp. 151-173. The citation for Origen is “On Psalm 37” in Jacques P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: D’Amboise, 1883), vol. 12, p. 1322.

7 “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington: Catholic University Press, 1962), vol. I, p. 157. Adolf von Harnack asserts that “as a rule whenever bloody persecutions were afoot, Jews were either in the background or the foreground.” See *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity* (London: The Theological Library, 1908), vol. I, p. 58ff. Dom Henri Leclercq in his *Les Martyrs* (Tours: Maine Editrices, 1921), devotes the entire introduction of one volume to a description of Jewish violence and hostility. See *Les Martyrs*, vol. IV.

8Edward Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 29 and 34. See also “Toledot Jeshu” in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 15, p. 1208; and R. Travers Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1903), passim.

9Ibid., p. 38. Also, A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1935), chapter 7.

10Pinchas Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), pp. 68 and 72. Also, see V. Petra, *Commentaria ad Constitutiones Apostolicas seu Bullas* (Venice: Typographia Balleoniana, 1741).

11Edward A. Synan, *The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), pp. 45-47.

12Ibid., pp. 52-53. Also, Allan and Helen Cutler, *The Jew as Ally of the Muslim: Medieval Roots of Anti-Semitism* (Notre Dame: The University Press, 1986), pp. 2-14. The Cutlers insist that not only Christian literature of the period, but also Jewish literature verifies a close association and collaboration of Jew with Muslim. Similarly, B. Netanyahu in *The Marranos of Spain* (New York: The American Academy for Jewish Research, 1966), argues that medieval anti-semitism was a result not of Christian theology, but of the political situation in conjunction with rather powerful socio-economic forces unleashed by the general development of Western Europe as a whole.

- 13Synan, p. 231.
- 14St. Bernard of Clairvaux, "Epistola 363" in *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: D'Amboise, 1883), vol. 182, p. 567ff. Also, Robert Burns, *The Crusader Kingdom of Valencia: Reconstruction of a 13th Century Frontier*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), and "Muslim Christian Conflict in Medieval Spain," *Thought*, vol. 54 (1979), pp. 238-252.
- 15Synan, pp. 109-110.
- 16Ibid., pp. 131-134.
- 17Ibid., p. 164.
- 18E.E.V. Hales, *The Catholic Church in the Modern World* (New York: Hanover House, 1958).
- 19Sources on this include Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow* (London: The Oxford University Press, 1968) and *The Great Terror* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1968). Also, James Zatzko.
- 20Pinchas Lapide, *Three Popes and the Jews* (New York: Hawthorn Publishers, Inc., 1967), pp. 90-92.
- 21Derek Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1981), pp. 110-117.
- 22Ibid.
- 23Lapide, *op. cit.*, pp. 237-252. Also, see Oscar Halecki, *Pius XII: Die Pope of Peace* (New York: Creation Age Press, 1951), and Michael O'Carroll, *Pius XII: Greatness Dishonored* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1980).
- 24Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers Keepers* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957), pp. 72-77. Also, Susan Zucotti, *Italians and the Holocaust* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1987). When the Germans demanded that all Jews in occupied zones be surrendered to them, General Robotti, Commander of the Second Italian Army refused to comply. General Giuseppe Picche likewise rejected German demands, as did General Roatta. Army officers who so resisted apparently found support among officials in the Italian Foreign Office. Other important sources include Alexander Ramati, *The Assisi Underground* (New York: Stein and Day, 1978), and Fernande Leboucher, *Incredible Mission* (New York: Doubleday Co., In., 1969).
- 25Eugenio Zolli, *Before the Dawn* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954), p. 187. There are many similarly eloquent testimonies to the vigor and depth of Pius XII's efforts on behalf of persecuted Jews. In June of 1944 when Allied armies liberated Rome, the Bulletin of the "Jewish Brigade Group," which fought with the Eighth Army, carried the following in its front page editorial: "To the everlasting glory of the people of Rome and the Roman Catholic Church the fate of countless Jews was alleviated. Even now, many remain in the religious houses which opened their doors to protect them from deportation." The Hebrew daily of Israel's Federation of Labor captured the spirit of those days in Rome in the words of a Jewish Brigade officer, "When we entered Rome, the Jewish survivors told us with voices filled with deep gratitude and respect, if we have been rescued, if Jews are still alive in Rome, come with us and thank the pope in the Vatican. For in the Vatican proper, in churches, monasteries, and private homes Jews were kept hidden on his personal orders ... even on the synagogue near the Tiber he had his papal seal imprinted." See Lapide, *op. cit.*, pp. 227-229.
- 26Lapide, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-141.
- 27Ibid., p. 149.
- 28Ibid., p. 165. Also, Theodore Lavi, *Vatican Endeavors on Behalf of Roumanian Jewry* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1961).
- 29Ibid., pp. 168-169. In Bulgaria similarly incessant intervention by the Holy See and local clergy was able to secure the cancellation of deportation orders for some 50,000 Jews. See pp. 170-172.
- 30Ibid., pp. 188-193.
- 31Ibid., p. 193.
- 32Ibid., pp. 197-204.
- 33Chaim Lipschitz, *Franco, Spain, the Jews, and the Holocaust* (New York: K.T.A.V. Publishing House, 1984), pp. 3-5.
- 34Ibid, pp 52-70. See Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Press, 1961), p. 549.
- 35Ibid., pp. 142-43.
- 36Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1982),

vol. II, pp. 260-286 and passim. Other important sources include Richard Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: Poles Under German Occupation* (Louisville: The University Press of Kentucky, 1986); Wladyslaw Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped Jews* (London: Eariscourt Publications, Ltd., 1969); Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi Occupied Poland* (London: The Oxford University Press, 1986); and Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1971).

37Bartoszewski, op. cit., pp. 420-423. I think it significant that among “Righteous Gentiles” from fourteen different European nations honored by Israel’s Yad Vasheem Memorial Authority a disproportionate 25 per cent are from Poland; One Polish bishop who spent most of the war in a Nazi concentration camp insists: “The Nazi criminals habitually broke their promises and ignored every moral obligation. If the pope and bishops could do nothing on behalf of their own priests and people - over 3000 priests and three million Polish Catholics were murdered - how can anyone credibly pretend that Hitler might have conceded more to him on behalf of Jews and others if he had acted differently than he did?”

38Jeno Levai, *Hungarian Jewry and the Papacy* (London: Sands and Co., 1968), pp. 17-54. Also, *The Black Book of the Martyrdom of Hungarian Jewry* (Vienna: Panorama Publishing Co., 1948).

39Ibid., pp. 54-98.

40Rolf Hochhuth, *The Representative* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Verlag, 1963). Levai, as the most respected Jewish historian of the Holocaust in Hungary, insists the Hochhuth’s allegations are not only directly contrary to easily verifiable historical facts, but “deliberately malicious and fabricated.” See *Hungarian Jewry and the Papacy*, pp. ix-xii, and 1-16.

41Lapide, op. cit., p. 263.

42Ibid., p. 269.

43Ibid., pp. 214-215.