Holocaust

Learn about the timeline of the Holocaust with this custom list of highlighted Holocaust events.

Learn More About The Holocaust Timeline

It's easy to mix up historical events within the Holocaust timeline or World War II timeline. Although far from a comprehensive timeline of the Holocaust and all that happened, this list of key historical events helps show the progression of persecution to mass murder, relevant events of WWII, and the subsequent liberation of concentration camps.

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Holocaust Historical Timeline

1933

- **January 30**: Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany
- **February 27**: The German Parliament (Reichstag) Building burns down.
- **March 22**: Dachau concentration camp, the first of the Holocaust, opens.
- **March 23**: Enabling Act passes, which gave the German Cabinet—most importantly, the Chancellor—the powers to make and enforce laws without the involvement of the Reichstag or Weimar President Paul von Hindenburg.
- **April 1**: National Boycott of Jewish shops and businesses.

- **April 25**: Law Against Overcrowding in Schools and Universities passes, which dramatically limits the number of Jewish students attending public schools.

- **May 10**: Public burnings of books written by Jews, political dissidents, and others not approved by the state takes place.

- **July 14**: Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases mandates the forced sterilization of certain individuals with physical and mental disabilities. Provided the basis for the involuntary sterilization of people/groups targeted by Nazi Germany, including Roma and Sinti and Afro-Germans.

- **October 4**: Editors Law forbids non-"Aryans" to work in journalism.

1934

- **August 2**: German President von Hindenburg dies. With the support of the German armed forces, Hitler becomes President of Germany.

- **August 19**: Hitler abolishes the office of President and declares himself Führer (dictator) of the German Reich and People, in addition to his position as Chancellor. In this capacity as Führer, Hitler's decisions are not bound by the laws of the state.

- **November-December**: SS chief Himmler consolidates control over and de facto unifies the German state political police forces into the Gestapo office in Berlin under the authority of his deputy, Reinhard Heydrich.

- **December 10**: SS chief Himmler creates the Inspectorate of Concentration Camps under the leadership of SS General Theodor Eicke. This move formalizes the SS takeover and centralization of the concentration camp system that had taken place in July 1934.

1935

- **April 1**: Nazi Germany bans Jehovah's Witness Organizations. The ban is due to Jehovah's Witnesses refusal to swear allegiance to the state, as it went against their religious convictions.

- **June 28**: The German Ministry of Justice revises Paragraphs 175 and 175a of the German criminal code to facilitate the systematic persecution of gay men and provide police with broader means for prosecution.

- **September 15**: Nazi Germany enacts the Nuremberg (Race) Laws. These Anti-Jewish racial laws determine who was considered a "Jew," and deem that Jews were no longer considered German citizens ("Reich Citizenship Law") and that Jews cannot marry Aryans, nor can they fly the German flag ("Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor").

1936

- **March 3**: Jewish doctors barred from practicing medicine in German institutions

- **July 12**: Sachsenhausen concentration camp opens.

- **August 1-16**: Olympics held in Berlin, Germany. They are a show of Nazi propaganda, stirring significant conflict. In Germany, many non-Aryans are excluded from participating and attending. Despite the exclusionary principles of the 1936 Games, countries around the world still agree to participate.

1937

- **July 15**: Buchenwald concentration camp opens.

- **November 8**: Josef Goebbels, Reich propaganda minister, and Julius Streicher, editor of the antisemitic newspaper, Der Stürmer (The Attacker) open the antisemitic exhibition Der Ewige Jude (The Eternal Jew) at the library of the German Museum in Munich, Germany.

1938

- **March 11-13**: Germany annexes Austria, in what is known as the Anschluss, incorporating the country into the German Reich.
- **April 26**: Mandatory registration of all property held by Jews inside the Reich.
- **July 6-15**: Evian Conference: delegates from 32 countries and representatives meet to discuss the German-Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany. Though countries are encouraged to find a long-term solution to the problem, the United States and other countries are unwilling to ease their immigration restrictions. Except for the Dominican Republic, no country is willing to accept more refugees.
- **August 1**: Adolf Eichmann establishes the Office of Jewish Emigration in Vienna to increase the pace of forced emigration.
- **August 17**: The Executive Order on the Law on the Alteration of Family and Personal Names ("Jewish Name Law") requires German Jews bearing first names of "non-Jewish" origin to adopt an additional name: "Israel" for men and "Sara" for women.
- **September 30**: Munich Conference: Germany, Italy, Great Britain, and France sign Munich Agreement in the hopes of preventing war. The agreement permits German occupation of the Sudentenland, previously western Czechoslovakia.
- **October 5**: Following request by Swiss authorities, Germans mark all Jewish passports with a large letter "J" to restrict Jews from immigrating to Switzerland.
- **November 9-10**: Kristallnacht (Night of Broken Glass): Anti-Jewish pogram in Germany, Austria, and the Sudetenland where over 1,400 synagogues are destroyed, 7,500 Jewish shops looted, and 30,000 male Jews sent to concentration camps (Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen) in one night.
- **November 12**: Decree on the Elimination of the Jews from Economic Life passes, forcing all Jews to transfer retail businesses to Aryan hands.
- **November 15**: All Jewish pupils are expelled from German schools.

- **December 2**: First Kindertransport arrives in Great Britain. Kindertransport (Children's Transport) was a series of rescue efforts (organized by Jewish communal groups in Germany and Austria) which brought thousands of refugee Jewish children to Great Britain between 1938 and 1940.

1939

- **January 30**: Reichstag Speech: Führer and Reich Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, tells the German public and the world that the outbreak of war would mean the end of European Jewry.

- **February 9**:FWagner-Rogers Bill is introduced to the U.S. government – never passes. Senator Robert Wagner of New York and Representative Edith Rogers of Massachusetts introduces a bill to permit the entry of 20,000 refugee children, ages 14 and under, from the Greater German Reich into the United States over the course of two years. The bill dies in committee in the summer of 1939.

- **March 15**: Germany occupies Czechoslovakia.

- **May 13**: German transatlantic liner St. Louis sets sail from Hamburg, Germany, for Havana, Cuba. On board are over 900 passengers, almost all of them Jews fleeing from Nazi Germany. They are denied entry into Cuba upon arrival and sent back to Europe (also being denied entry into the United States enroute back). Only two-thirds survive the Holocaust.

- **August 23**: German-Soviet Pact is signed. It allows Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to control/invade portions of eastern Europe, while pledging not to attack each other for 10 years.

- **September 1**: Beginning of World War II: Germany and Soviet Union invade Poland.

- **October**: Euthanasia Program officially begins. Hitler signs a secret authorization to protect participating physicians, medical staff, and administrators from prosecution. This authorization is backdated to September 1, 1939, to suggest that the effort was related to

- **October 28**: Nazi Germany and allies establish first Polish ghetto in Piotrkow.
- **November 23**: Jews in German-occupied Poland forced to wear an arm band or yellow star

1940

- **Early February**: Establishment of Lodz Ghetto.
- **April 9**: Germany invades Denmark and Norway.
- **May 10**: Germany invades the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and France.
- **May 20**: Concentration camp is established at Auschwitz.
- **June 10**: Italy declares war on Britain and France, entering WWII.
- **June 14**: The first mass transport arrives at Auschwitz I, consisting of 728 Polish political prisoners from Tarnow.
- **June 15**: Soviet Union invades Lithuania (other Baltic States are invaded next day).
- **September 27**: Axis Alliance is formed between Germany, Italy, and Japan with the signing of the Tripartite Pact.
- **October 12**: Decree to establish Warsaw Ghetto.
- **October 28**: Italy invades Greece.

1941

- **January**: Pograms (Anti-Jewish riots) held in Romania, hundreds of Jews murdered.
- **April 6**: Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece.

- **June 6**: Nazi Germany issues Commissar Order: Commissars were officials in the Soviet communist party assigned to military units to spread patriotic, pro-communist propaganda. They were not active soldiers. This order authorized German soldiers to execute commissars, which goes against the International Laws of War.
- **June 22**: Germany invades the Soviet Union ("Operation Barbarossa").
- **June 24**: Germany invades Lithuania.
- **August 24**: Euthanasia Program "ceases" due to public attention/protest (simply goes underground).
- **September 1**: Jewish badges/Stars of David required to be worn by Jews in the Reich
- **September 29-30**: Mass shootings occur in Kyiv, Ukraine. In two days, German police and the Einsatzgruppen, along with local collaborators, murder over 30,000 Jews in a ravine called Babyn Yar (Babi Yar).
- **October 15**: Nazi Germany initiates plan to murder approximately two million Jews living in German-occupied Poland. Later code-named Operation Reinhard, three killing centers (Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka) were established under this plan.
- **October 29**: German SS and police units and Lithuanian police auxiliaries murder 9,200 residents of the Jewish ghetto in Kovno (Kaunas; Kovne), Lithuania, in Fort IX on the edge of the city.
- **November 24**: Theresienstadt ghetto-camp is established.
- **December 7**: Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.
- **December 8**: Chelmo killing center begins operations.
- **December 8**: United States declares war on Japan, entering WWII officially a few days later

1942

- **January 20:** Wannsee Conference in Berlin: Plan is developed for "Final Solution"
- **March 1:** Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center is established.
- **March 17:** Mass murder operations begin at Belzec killing center.
- **May:** Mass murder operations begin at Sobibor killing center.
- **May 27:** Czech agents attempt an assassination of Reinhard Heydrich, chief of Reich Security. He dies of his wounds in early June and becomes the namesake of Operation Reinhard.
- **June:** Jewish partisan units establish in the forests of Byelorussia and the Baltic states.
- **July 23:** Mass murder operations begin at Treblinka II killing center.
- **Summer:** Deportation of Jews to killing centers from Belgium, Croatia, France, the Netherlands, and Poland; armed resistance by Jews in ghettos of Kletzk, Kremenets, Lachva, Mir, and Tuchin.
- **October:** Mass murder operations begins at Majdanek killing center.
- **Winter:** Deportation of Jews from Germany, Greece and Norway to killing centers; Jewish partisan movement organizes in forests near Lublin.
- **December 17:** The Allied nations issue a declaration stating explicitly that the German authorities were engaging in mass murder of the European Jews, and that those responsible for this "bestial policy of cold-blooded extermination" would "not escape retribution."

1943

- **February 2:** German defeat at Stalingrad. The battle became a turning point, ending a

- **April 19**: Warsaw Ghetto uprising begins. During this uprising, U.S. and British diplomats at the Bermuda Conference reject all new recommendations to rescue the Jews of Europe.
- **Summer**: Armed resistance by Jews in Bedzin, Bialystok, Czestochowa, Lvov, and Tarnow ghettos
- **August 2**: Uprising in Treblinka II killing center begins.
- **September 8**: Italy surrenders to the Allies.
- **October 14**: Uprising in Sobibor killing center begins.
- **September-October**: Danish Jews escape to Sweden with help of Danish resistance.
- **November 3**: Operation "Harvest Festival" (Aktion Erntefest) begins. Nervous due to recent uprisings, the SS decide to murder the remaining Jews in Majdanek.

1944

- **January 22**: US President Franklin D. Roosevelt creates the War Refugee Board.
- **March 19**: Germany occupies Hungary
- **May 15**: Nazis begin deporting Hungarian Jews.
- **June**: Chelmo is reopened and restaffed to murder the remaining Jews in Lodz ghetto.
- **June 6**: D-Day occurs as U.S., British, and Canadian troops land on the beaches of Normandy.
- **July 23**: Soviets liberate Majdanek.
- **August 9**: Liquidation of the Lodz ghetto begins.
- **October 7**: Prisoner Revolt begins at Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center; one crematorium

- **November 25**: Heinrich Himmler orders the destruction of the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chambers and crematoria to destroy evidence of mass killings.

1945

- **January**: Lodz ghetto is liberated.
- **January 17**: Death march begins from Auschwitz.
- **January 17**: SS abandon Chelmo as Soviets approach.
- **January 27**: Soviet Army liberates Auschwitz.
- **April 4**: Liberation of Ohrdruf by US Troops. This was the first Nazi camp liberated by US troops.
- **April 15**: Liberation of Bergen Belsen by British Army.
- **April 26**: Death march begins for inmates of Dachau.
- **April 29**: Liberation of Dachau by U.S. Troops.
- **April 30**: Hitler takes his own life by suicide.
- **May 5**: Liberation of Mauthausen and Gusen by U.S. Troops.
- **May 7**: Germany surrenders.
- **Spring**: Large numbers of Holocaust refugees are housed in Displacement Persons (DP) camps across Europe.
- **September 2**: World War II comes to an end after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S. More than 200,000 Japanese civilians were killed due to the bombings.

- **December 22:** President Truman gives preference to Holocaust survivors for U.S. immigrant visas. However, the process of immigrating continues to be complicated and difficult in the years to come.

Hear From the Survivors

Learn the history from those who lived it. Hear firsthand accounts from survivors of the Holocaust who lived through the sobering events listed in the Holocaust timeline. The Oral Histories project offers these stories as a celebration of life and a crucial part of honoring and remembering the past.

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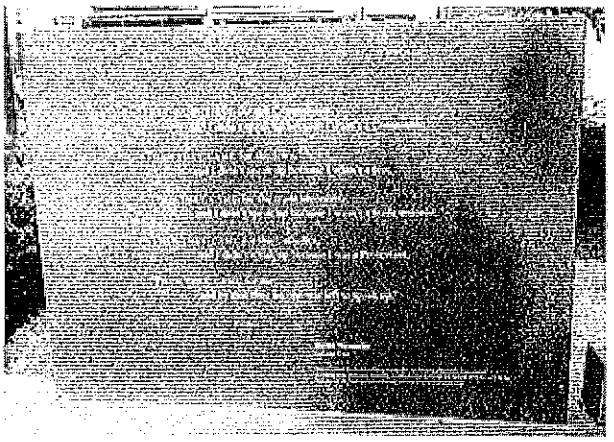
First They Came

(Redirected from First they came)

"First They Came" (German: *Als sie kamen* lit. 'When they came', or *Habe ich geschwiegen* lit. 'I did not speak out'), is the poetic form of a 1946 post-war confessional prose piece by the German Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller (1892–1984). It is about the silent complicity of German intellectuals and clergy following the Nazis' rise to power and subsequent incremental purging of their chosen targets. Many variations and adaptations in the spirit of the original have been published in the English language.



Engraving of the confession in poetic form presented at the New England Holocaust Memorial in Boston, Massachusetts

Text

The best-known versions of the confession in English are the edited versions in poetic form that had begun circulating by the 1950s.[1] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum quotes the following text as one of the many poetic versions of the speech:[2][3]

> First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—
> Because I was not a socialist.
>
> Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—
> Because I was not a trade unionist.
>
> Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
> Because I was not a Jew.
>
> Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

A longer version by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, a charity established by the British government, is as follows:[4]

> First they came for the Communists
> And I did not speak out
> Because I was not a Communist

Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist

Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist

Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew

Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me

The original German language writing, as preserved by Martin-Niemöller-Haus Berlin-Dahlem, is as follows:[5]

Als die Nazis die Kommunisten holten,
habe ich geschwiegen; ich war ja kein Kommunist.

Als sie die Gewerkschafter holten, habe ich geschwiegen;
ich war ja kein Gewerkschafter.

Als sie die Sozialdemokraten einsperrten, habe ich geschwiegen;
ich war ja kein Sozialdemokrat.

Als sie die Juden einsperrten, habe ich geschwiegen;
ich war ja kein Jude.

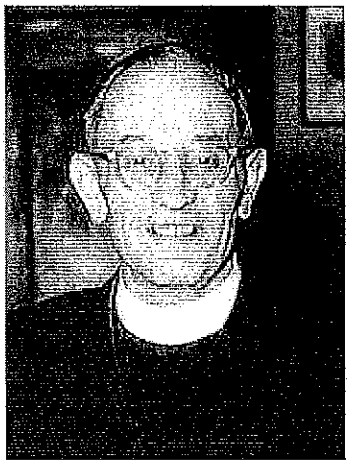
Als sie mich holten, gab es keinen mehr, der protestieren konnte.

Author

Martin Niemöller was a German Lutheran pastor and theologian born in Lippstadt, Germany, in 1892. Niemöller was an anti-Communist and supported Adolf Hitler's rise to power. But when Hitler rose to power and insisted on the supremacy of the state over religion, Niemöller became disillusioned. He became the leader of a group of German clergymen opposed to Hitler.

In 1937 he was arrested and eventually confined in Sachsenhausen and Dachau. He was released in 1945 by the Allies. He continued his career in Germany as a cleric and as a leading voice of penance and reconciliation for the German people after World War II.

Origin



Niemöller at The Hague's Grote Kerk in May 1952

Niemöller made confession in his speech for the Confessing Church in Frankfurt on 6 January 1946, of which is a partial translation:[1]

> "... The people who were put in the camps then were Communists. Who cared about them? We knew it, it was printed in the newspapers. Who raised their voice, maybe the Confessing Church? We thought: Communists, those opponents of religion, those enemies of Christians—"should I be my brother's keeper?"
>
> Then they got rid of the sick, the so-called incurables. I remember a conversation I had with a person who claimed to be a Christian. He said "Perhaps it's right, these incurably sick people just cost the state money, they are just a burden to themselves and to others. Isn't it best for all concerned if they are taken out of the middle [of society]? " Only then did the church as such take note.
>
> Then we started talking, until our voices were again silenced in public. Can we say, we aren't guilty/responsible?
>
> The persecution of the Jews, the way we treated the occupied countries, or the things in Greece, in Poland, in Czechoslovakia or in Holland, that were written in the newspapers. I believe, we Confessing-Church-Christians have every reason to say: mea culpa, mea culpa! We can talk ourselves out of it with the excuse that it would have cost me my head if I had spoken out.
>
> We preferred to keep silent. We are certainly not without fault, and I ask myself again and again, what would have happened, if in the year 1933 or 1934—there must have been a possibility—14,000 Protestant pastors and all Protestant communities in Germany had defended the truth until their deaths? If we had said back then, it is not right when Hermann Göring simply puts 100,000 Communists in the concentration camps, in order to let them die. I can imagine that perhaps 30,000 to 40,000 Protestant Christians would have had their heads cut off, but I can also imagine that we would have rescued 30–40 million people, because that is what it is costing us now."

This speech was translated and published in English in 1947, but was later retracted when it was alleged that Niemöller was an early supporter of the Nazis.[6] The Communists, socialists, schools, Jews, the press, and the Church are named in a 1955 version of Niemöller's speech that was cited in an interview with a German professor who quoted Niemöller. A representative in America made a similar speech in 1968, omitting Communists but including industrialists who were only targeted by the Nazis on an individual basis.

Niemöller is quoted as having used many versions of the text during his career, but evidence identified by professor Harold Marcuse at the University of California Santa Barbara indicates that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum version is inaccurate because Niemöller frequently used the word "communists" and not "socialists."[1] The substitution of "socialists" for "communists" is an effect of anti-communism, and most common in the version that has proliferated in the United States. According to Marcuse, "Niemöller's original argument was premised on naming groups he and his audience would instinctively not care about. The omission of Communists in Washington, and of Jews in Germany, distorts that meaning and should be corrected."[1]

In 1976, Niemöller gave the following answer in response to an interview question asking about the origins of the poem.[1] The *Martin-Niemöller-Stiftung* ("Martin Niemöller Foundation") considers this the "classical" version of the speech:

> There were no minutes or copy of what I said, and it may be that I formulated it differently. But the idea was anyhow: The Communists, we still let that happen calmly; and the trade unions, we also let that happen; and we even let the Social Democrats happen. All of that was not our affair.[7]

Role in Nazi Germany

Like many Protestant pastors, Niemöller was a national conservative, and openly supported the conservative opponents of the Weimar Republic. Thus he welcomed Hitler's accession to power in 1933, believing that it would bring a national revival. By the autumn of 1934, Niemöller joined other Lutheran and Protestant churchmen such as Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in founding the Confessional Church, a Protestant group that opposed the Nazification of the German Protestant churches.

Still in 1935, Niemöller made pejorative remarks about Jews, while protecting those of Jewish descent who had been baptised in his own church, but were persecuted by the Nazis due to their racial origins. In a sermon in 1935, he once said, "What is the reason for [their] obvious punishment, which has lasted for thousands of years? Dear brethren, the reason is easily given: the Jews brought the Christ of God to the cross!"[8]

In 1936, however, he decidedly opposed the Nazis' "Aryan paragraph". Niemöller signed the petition of a group of Protestant churchmen which sharply criticized Nazi policies and declared the Aryan Paragraph incompatible with the Christian virtue of charity. The Nazi regime responded with mass arrests and charges against almost 800 pastors and ecclesiastical lawyers.[9]

THE ROOTS OF ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT

AUSCHWITZ: THE TRIUMPH OF EVIL IN A SOCIETY WITHOUT GOD

Remi Hoeckman

This millennium is on the verge of ending, but the memory of Auschwitz will never end. The memory of that reality which was absolutely nefarious, absolutely savage and in many singular aspects, and it scared this century for ever - the Holocaust, the systematic killing on the part of the Nazis of some six million Jews, men, women and children for whom Auschwitz became the tragic emblem - it must not end. «Many cried, then, and still today we hear the echo of their lament» said John Paul II to hundreds of people, Christians and Jews, including the survivors of the Holocaust, who were in the Vatican on April 7, 1994 «but their seed will not die with them. It will rise up powerful, agonizingly, it goes straight to the heart and says: "Don't forget us!"». We must really remember. It is necessary to remember. «But remembering is not enough», the Holy Father strongly affirmed. The end of this century, of this millennium must coincide with the end of Anti-Judaism, of the contempt that the Christians had for the Jews and for Judaism, with the end of anti-Semitism, of racial hate, sins against God and humanity which have afflicted history for a long time and contributed to create an atmosphere in which the holocaust - whose enormity and terror seem impossible to perceive - became possible. The beginning of a new century, of a new millennium, must signal the end of a long period on which we must not tire ourselves with reflection in order to extract the just conclusions. «Because in our time, deplorably, there still exist many new manifestations of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and racial hate which were the seeds of those unnamable crimes. Humanity can not allow for all this to happen again. For this reason we remember Auschwitz». Auschwitz opened «our eyes», said the Pope in the course of his encounter with the representatives of the Episcopal Conferences on March 6, 1982, and it is the firm purpose of the Church, expressed in the Post-Council documents as well as in the teachings of the Pope - "through my person" just as the Holy Father emphasized in his address to the Jewish community in the Roman Synagogue - that keeping the memory alive, can open the eyes of everyone and of anyone, anywhere, to ensure that evil will not prevail over good just as happened at Auschwitz. In fact, the Holocaust and Auschwitz (and all the other names of the concentration camps which recall the memory of the cruelty perpetrated by the Nazis during the Second World War) have become a sort of an archtypical metaphor of the triumph of evil on a large scale.

With regards to the question of anti-Judaism (with its religious connotations) and of anti-Semitism (in its complexity and ambiguity) and the relations between what Jules Isaac described as "the teaching of the contempt" on the part of the Christians and the Holocaust, some authors have compiled an attempt to trace a straight and unbroken line which starts from the Christian teaching to the gas chambers at Auschwitz *(1)*.

But these attempts have been denied by many historians, who affirm, like the famous Jew Yosef Yerushalmi: «There is no other question if not that Christian anti-Semitism throughout the various eras contributed to create the climate and the mentality in which the genocide, once conceived, could be carried out with scarce or no opposition. But even if we admit that the Christian teaching was without doubt one of the causes which lead to the Holocaust, it certainly was not the only one [...]. The Holocaust was the work of a State exclusively

modern, neopagan (secularized)»*(2)*. And Roland Modras comments «Like Yerushalmi, the scholars who wrote on the subject generally found themselves in agreement on the fact that there is a substantial difference between Christian anti-Judaism and racist anti-Semitism, that something new entered in the socio-historic sphere which rendered the Holocaust possible in our century, which could not even have been conceivable in the Christian Middle Ages. Here I refer to something which goes beyond modern technology and bureaucratic efficiency which rendered the Holocaust technically attainable. Modernity also corroded the traditional religious ties which influenced the human behavior and gave free reign to the uncontrollable ideologies which were not just anti-Jewish and anti-Christian, but were openly pagan. [CS1] [CS2]*(3)*. Thus, for the same reason that anti-Judaism and still more, anti-Semitism found a place in the thought and in the practice of many Christians in the course of history invites an act of contrition.

The Holy Father repeatedly insisted on this, and a Jew, Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp, himself a survivor of the Holocaust, helps us to dig deep in its meaning. "The true meaning of repentance (Teshuva)" he said at the Eisenach Conference in 1993, "must not be achieved with a feeling of guilt, but it is necessary to learn from the experience and transform errors and transgressions in the passion for a new future».

Rabbi Irving Greenberg finds the "something new," of which Modras also speaks, in the same secularity when society is deprived of the respect of God for man*(4)*. «In other words - Ronald Modras opportunity observes - there is a discontinuation between Christian anti-Judaism and Nazi racism which rendered the Holocaust possible, a discontinuation which passed completely unobserved and unexplored when both were classified with the same denomination of "anti-Semitism". Therefore we must go beyond these questions. In the words of John Paul II, "we must remember, but remembering is not enough". "We have a commitment [...]. We must redouble our efforts to liberate man from the spectrum of racism, from exclusion, from alienation, from the slavery and from xenophobia, to eliminate these evils which proceed in our society [...]. Evil always appears under new forms [...]. It is our duty to unmask its dangerous power and neutralize it with the help of God"»*(5)*.

To unmask evil means to go to its roots. «Identify it and denounce the manifestations of evil, and be united against it, it is a noble act and it is a test of our reciprocal fraternal commitment», the Holy Father said to the Executive Committee of the International Council of Christians and Jews on July 6, 1984, «but it is necessary to go to the roots of that evil». And he emphasized the important role of education towards that end. In fact, all this would not be sufficient if it was not accompanied by a profound change in our hearts, of an authentic spiritual conversion, since «the ultimate source of violence is the corruption of the human heart», he said to a group of young Christians and Jews who visited the Vatican on July 2, 1993, and this corruption of the human heart is a consequence of the absence of faith in God. In fact, «the reflection on the Holocaust shows us to what terrible consequence the lack of faith in God and the contempt for man created in his image and likeness can bring», the Pope wrote in a letter for the then President of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the US on August 8, 1987. «In front of these risks which also threaten the sons and daughters of this generation, Christians and Jews together have a lot to offer to a world which fights to distinguish the evil from the good, a world wanted by the Creator to defend and protect life, but so vulnerable to the voices which diffuse values which only bring to death and destruction»*(6)*.

The words of the Holy Father remind us of the words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel who said: «not one of us can do it on his own». Today, between Jews and Christians things are changing. The reciprocal stereotypes, the prejudices and the caricatures have slowly gone and disappeared. A new spirit is permeating our relations. As was established in the course of the International Catholic Jewish Liaison Committee gathered in Prague in 1990, good will

and common objectives are taking the place of suspicions, resentments and indifference. This new spirit must now manifest itself in the work which our two communities of faith could accomplish together to answer to the needs of the world of today. This should be the "order of the day." After two millennia of distance and hostility, Christians and Jews have the sacrosanct duty to create an authentic culture of esteem and of reciprocal attention, so that our dialogue can become a sign of hope and of inspiration for the outer religions, races and ethnic groups to abandon the contempt towards the realization of an authentic human fraternity. As John Paul II wrote in his message to the people of his native Poland on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the revolt of the ghetto of Warsaw, «As Christians and Jews, following the example of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing to the entire world. This is the common duty which awaits us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to be in the first place a "blessing" one for the other».

It is true to affirm that the Christians, and in a particular way, the Catholics, are well aware of our obligations to history and the challenges which we still have to face to heal the deep wounds of the past. We must also go further than the dream of a simple and peaceful coexistence between Christians and Jews, which is always fragile especially in times of crisis, to build something more solid, but not just for the aim of bettering our relations, but in this way to contribute to the well-being of the world in which we live and in the regards of - as much as for Jews than as for Christians who are convinced - we have a particular responsibility given to us by God himself. It is evident that the role of education for both, Christians and Jews, is of vital importance in this process. There, where the Catholic Church is involved, the intuition, the discovery and the vision of the Second Vatican Council*(7)* found a positive reply in our communities. They put up to inspection the wrong approaches, mentalities or attitudes and principles which were forgotten or hidden. They produced directives for a change and made available suggestions to put into act. The objective now is to render the contents of those principles and of those directives of the teaching of the Church truly effective by means of education, of a wider community and therefore, in the first place are educators of those communities, for example our theologians and priests, teachers and catechists. The tremendous need to go forward and develop the work already started for the building of "bridges" of respect and of reciprocal comprehension between our two communities, both which God loves, for the good of humanity, is today evident.

«Re-evoking the memory of Auschwitz, the memory of the triumph of evil, cannot but fill us with profound pain," reflected the Holy Father before the Angelus prayer on January 29, 1995. "Unfortunately, yet, our days continue to be signaled by great violence. God, will not allow us to shed tears for other Auschwitz of our time».

NOTES

1) John Paul II during a visit to the Synagogue of Rome on April 13, 1994.

2)from: Eva Fleischner (ed.) *Auschwitz :Beginning of a New Era?* New York 1997, by Ronald Modras, *Christian Anti-Semitism and Auschwitz : some reflections on Responsibility* in "New Theology Review," Volume 10, Number 3, August 1997, pp.58-71.

3) *Ibid.*

4) *Auschwitz : Beginning of a New Era?* op.cit.

5) John Paul II on April 7, 1994.

6) *Ibid.*

7) cfr. *Nostrae Aetate*, 4.

Danielle Rousseau

Enabling Evil: How the Nazi Regime Made Atrocities More Palatable

One of the shocking realizations about the Holocaust and other campaigns of genocide around the world is that these atrocities were perpetrated by seemingly ordinary individuals rather than monsters. In his book "Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland," Christopher Browning (1992) explores how average middle-aged German police officers became mass murderers. The author's "multicausal explanation" (Browning, 1992, p. 215) includes a wide range of factors that include propaganda and dehumanization of the Jews, conformity and peer pressure, deference to authority (however tentative), gradual desensitization and routinization, division of labor, assertions of fear of punishment, career advancement, and the context provided by the war.

Another book features similar themes but appears only as a footnote in Browning's tome. Hannah Arendt's (1963) "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil" discusses Adolf Eichmann, the mid-level bureaucrat who managed the logistics of deportation of Jews to death camps. This man did not consider himself to be evil, found concentration camps revolting, and could not stand the sight of blood (Arendt, 1963). Yet, this was the man who directed the deportation of Hungarian Jews described in Elie Weisel's "Night" (2006).

Arendt reveals how the context of living in Nazi Germany shaped the non-Jewish citizens' thinking about the Jews. Through executive action, Jews were excluded from public service work in Germany beginning in 1933 – nine years before the events discussed by Browning (Wikipedia, 2019). Jewish students were not accepted at universities, and Jewish doctors and lawyers were gradually driven from those professional communities. Nazi troopers habitually vandalized Jewish businesses with total impunity. By 1935, Germany had a separate set of laws

for Jews (Wikipedia, 2019). As a result, it was not just propaganda but facts of German life at the time that contributed to the perpetrators' dehumanization of Jews.

Arendt notes that Heinrich Himmler, the architect of the "final solution," framed the extermination of Jews as a necessary evil that had to be shouldered by the current generation to secure Germany's future. Himmler told SS leaders that they must be "superhumanly inhuman" (Arendt, 1963, p. 104). In fact, participation in atrocities was framed not in terms of inflicting horrible things on people but rather in terms of having to shoulder the weight of witnessing the horror (Arendt, 1963). This framing allowed the perpetrators to view themselves as tragic heroes making a short-term sacrifice in the name of a thousand-year Reich.

Another linguistic tool for addressing the potential trauma was the elaborate system of euphemistic language that helped obscure the reality of Eichmann's and others' actions. Arendt states that documents where the words "killing" or "extermination" appear are extremely rare. The Nazi government instituted strict "language rules" (Arendt, 1963, p. 83) that replaced the above-mentioned terms with code words such as "final solution," "evacuation" and "special treatment." This consistent use of euphemistic terms removed perpetrators from the reality of their actions and was strictly adhered to throughout the entire Nazi government, even in interagency cooperation.

Consistent with Browning's findings, Arendt notes that breaking the process of genocide into small, ostensibly benign steps was another key mechanism employed by the Nazis. The officers from Reserve

Battalion 101 arrived at this idea by trial and error, but in the upper echelons of the Nazi government, this was part of the design. Arendt illustrates this through Eichmann's role, which primarily involved managing the logistics of deportations. Eichmann viewed himself not as a facilitator of mass murder but as a transportation expert solving complex problems. In fact, prior to the introduction of the "final solution," he applied himself to making it easier for Jews to emigrate to Palestine with equal zeal. Wading through Eichmann's revelations, self-delusions, obfuscations, and lies, Arendt arrives at the image of Eichmann as a middle-class, not supremely talented man whose thoughts were primarily occupied by finding ways to excel and build a career. By focusing solely on the tasks at hand, whether they resulted in saving people or killing people, Eichmann avoided considering the moral dimension of his actions.

The Nazi government's systematic approach to enabling atrocities is a frightening reminder that ordinary people can become complicit in morally reprehensible actions. Through gradual dehumanization, manipulation of language, framing terrible actions as necessary sacrifices, and breaking down the process of genocide into small, seemingly benign tasks, the Nazis created a system that enabled and facilitated moral disengagement. Browning's and Arendt's writings show that we are all vulnerable to the influences of authority, social pressure, and ideology. They remind us that we need to remain mindful and actively resist the forces that push us towards dehumanizing or devaluing any group of people.

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