

Roots of anti-Semitism – Reason for the Shoah

Falling out with the strangers

- **and the possibilities of a convergence
between Christians and Jews**

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The anti-Semitism of the National Socialists not only has one root, but a soil of roots, a wickerwork of roots. On the basis of anti-Semitism it can be shown how prejudices, intolerance, cultural non-knowledge, isolation, disassociation suddenly may have a devastating effect. It already had been all there latently, but suddenly, on the conditions of National Socialism, everything escalated into the most outrageous crimes.

In his essay “Considerations of Jew issue” (Betrachtungen zur Judenfrage), Jean-Paul Sartre wrote: “The anti-Semite recognizes voluntarily that the Jew is clever and hard-working, he will even confess that he is superior to him in this respect...The more virtues the Jew has, the more dangerous he is. The anti-Semite does not abandon himself to false illusions. He counts himself as middle-class, almost lower middle-class, in a word, as average. It never happens that an anti-Semite claims to be individually superior...many anti-Semites (belong) to the petty or petite bourgeoisie. They are civil servants, employees, small businessmen and the whole lot of them does not own a thing...By imagining the Jew as a thief, they put themselves in the enviable position of a man who could be robbed at all...So they chose anti-Semitism as a way of feeling like being a possessor...”

Political and economical roots of anti-Semitism

Behind the roots of anti-Semitism Sartre indicated, there is a long past history. Since 586 b. C., after the destruction of the first temple of Jerusalem and the captivity of the Jewish upper class in Babylon, but surely after the rebellion of Bar-Kochba 135 a. C., the Jews were forced to orientate their life in a different way than other people. Now they had to live and stick together in foreign parts of the world – for their sake of surviving. With the connection of throne and altar under Christian signs, the Jews were submitted to economical compulsory measures. They were excluded from all public positions. In the Middle Ages they hardly had any chance to be active as tradesmen, also when working for the Christians. For the Christians however it was forbidden to lend money against interests. The Jews therefore distinguished themselves in this field, especially since the 4th ecclesiastical council of Lateran in 1215.

That means: The economical possibilities of the Jews were constantly limited more and more during history, but they have learned to live with these limitations and were partly very successful in the niches that had been allocated to them. This again raised suspicion and

aversion against the Jews and finally led to madness-like fantasies with the National Socialists, who let out their hate on Jewry as a whole.

These economical and political fields mentioned here belong to the roots of anti-Semitism and are immediate roots of the National Socialist anti-Semitism, too, but in its part it is a consequence and it obliges us to a deeper consideration.

Social-psychological and cultural roots of anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism is irrational. It is subsisting on the elimination of critical common sense. It is non-scientific, mythologizing and demagogic, but that does not mean that scientists for example would not have advocated the theory. Jews are and have been the scapegoat for anti-Semites, symbolic figures of evil, a taboo subject. They appear threatening for the anti-Semite, but initially they already appear threatening for the ignorant, uneducated non-Jew. People generally seem to have difficulties with accepting foreigners – with a different language, a different culture, different foods and smells, different habits.

The anti-Semite internalizes foreignness, he applies many things to himself, that do not go for him initially. If one picks up anti-Semitic papers from the time of National Socialism, it immediately comes to one's attention that the anti-Semites projected that onto the Jews, what they wanted for themselves. On him, the Jew, they formulated their own aims and intentions and their own nature. Hitler formulates in "Mein Kampf": "By winning the political power, the Jew throws away the few covers he is still wearing. The democratic national-Jew becomes the blood-Jew and tyrant of nations. In a few years he is trying to exterminate the national bearers of intelligence and is making the nations ready for the lot of slavery of enduring subjugation by depriving their natural spiritual leadership." There is no need to prove that it was projected on the Jew here what had been a National Socialist aim. Hitler talks about his own intentions when talking about the aims of the Jews.

The world view of the anti-Semite is brusque and in a primitive way a kind of dualism – and from his point of view, a Jew always has to do evil things. He cannot do anything else and does not. When Hitler is talking about the extermination of the Jewish race, he has, of course in the sense of the naïve world view, an easy conscience: He is then a criminal for the good, holy cause. It is not his fault that he is the chosen one to eliminate evil in such an evil way. "The anti-Semite has recognized his murder instincts", like Sartre says, "but he found the adequate way to satisfy these without confessing that to himself."

The foreignness of the Jew is threatening for the anti-Semite – so he creates a myth for himself to be able to live with foreigners – this is the beginning, this is the main root of anti-Semitism. The anti-Semite can only bear to live in a world that is filled with and determined by his own ideas and where he rules. He is not able to accept people of another culture, language or religion as people with equal rights.

That the Jews did not worship God in pictures and that they believed in only one God, has been a decisive source for the feeling of foreignness already in the Old World. In this way they had been sensed as foreign and afterwards they had been stigmatized as foreign. Jews looked after themselves in the Diaspora, stuck to their own manners, their own culture and their own language. That appeared threatening enough for itself. The fear of the foreignness

of feasts and customs of the Jews is not to be underestimated in its consequences. It was suspected that they were slaughtering Christian children for Pessach, because they needed their blood for this feast / celebration. The names of the feasts / celebrations were strange: Pessach, Schawuoth, Sukkoth, Rosch Hoschanah, Jom Kippur, Purim, Channuka.

Jews had been living in polygamy in the Old World, that, too, must have had an impact on the fantasies of Christian males – they had prostitution as an alternative outlet for themselves.

Rabbis were married as a rule, while the Catholic Church represented the ideal of virginity, and since 1139, the renunciation / relinquishment of marriage is binding for priests. I suspect that a deep cultural break between Jewry and Christian Occident finds its expression in here.

Christian-theological roots of anti-Semitism

The book by Friedrich Heer named “Gods’ first love”, that came out in 1967, claims for itself in the subheading to deal and to throw light on the Genesis of the Austrian Catholic Adolf Hitler. From the history of the Old Church until Modern Age it showed that Christianity was in no way neutral or committed to Jewish people. On the contrary: many KZ (Concentration Camp) – guards were baptized Catholics who of course went to the mass on Christmas Eve. The Protestants, with Martin Luther and the anti-Semites in his succession, are in no considerably better position. Luther at first stated a relative friendly view about the Jews. But a stronger effect led from his writings / papers “About the Jews and their lies” (1542),

“About Schem Hamphoras and about the lineage of Christ” (1543). Luther is disappointed with the unwillingness of the Jews to be proselytized / converted and turns against them with harsh words. He demands the destruction of Jewish houses and the committal in temporary shacks. He demands the cancellation of the escort, the ban of profiteering, drudgery or rather slave labour for Jews being able to work. Original quotation Luther: “That their synagogues or schools shall be set on fire and what is not willing to burn shall be heaped and buried with soil, so that no man shall see a stone or anything else for all eternity. And such things shall be done to honour our Lord and the Christendom, so that God may see that we are Christians and that we did neither tolerate nor approve deliberately such public lying, cursing and derisive remarking about His son and His Christians.”

There is no doubt that remarks of that kind were quoted often enough and with pleasure between 1933 and 1945. Luther functioned as an informant / source of the National Socialists anti-Semites.

But Luther is not the only one in the history of the Church, who belongs to the soil of roots of National Socialist anti-Semitism. The Crusades had religious reasons and were primarily directed against the Jews. “The Jews murdered Christ – and what have they done there in reality? They murdered God!” So it was suggested: The one who kills a Jew, receives forgiveness of all sins. Princes and bishops had to stand up for the Jews, but the fanaticized masses lynched, pillaged and killed Jews on a huge scale under the leadership of preachers and monks.

The 4th Ecclesiastical Council of Lateran in 1215 will be decisive for the continuation of history: It formulates the theory of transubstantiation – that the elements bread and wine in the Holy Communion really are to be turned into the body and blood of Christ. Making a dogma out of this theory had consequences and gave birth to a number of legends of desecration of hosts: The one who desecrates a host, kills Christ.

One probably could think now that this anti-Judaism only is a matter of the Middle Ages, a matter of Luther and the time afterwards, while Lessing and others then formulated a basis for a new relationship, a new understanding of the religious communities for each other, just in the way of Nathan the Wise Man with his intelligence: “The right ring probably got lost.” It seems then like the Middle Ages had been the original dark epoch of all – until the time of Enlightenment. But this impression is deceptive. The time before was not considerably different, quite apart from the time afterwards, especially the 20th Century.

Yet before 313, so before the victory of Emperor Konstantin over his enemies, there were sharp anti-Jewish voices of theologians of the Church. Bishop Melito of Sardes marks a decisive turning point in the 2nd Century; he calls out: “Hear it, all people of all lineage and see it, a murder like never before happened in Jerusalem, in the town of law, in the Hebrew town. The one who made it all solid, is been fastened to the wood!...God is been murdered.”

In 313 a. C., Emperor Konstantin had been militarily victorious in the name of the Cross. At first, that means the abolition of persecution, tolerance and legacy. But little by little, this legacy had consequences for the relationship to other religions and especially to the Jews, too. The recruitment for Jewry, the recruitment of proselytes was restricted very strongly. In 339 a. C., the circumcision of a slave is punished with death penalty. A Christian who turns to Jewry may totally lose his property!

In the year 388, a synagogue burns in a Mesopotamian small town. It had been set on fire by a crowd of people incited by the local bishop. The Emperor decides that the synagogue shall be rebuilt at the expense of the bishop, that the guilty persons are to be punished. Then, the bishop of Milano, Ambrosius, preaches a sermon and writes a letter to the Emperor: “Are you willing to grant to the Jews this triumph over the Church, this victory over the Christian people, this cheering, oh ruler, to the unbelievers, this glory of the synagogue and this grief of the Church? – Together with these unbelievers, the testimonies of disbelief also have to be exterminated...”

The legal position of the Jews is constantly getting worse: Every missionary work is prohibited. Mixed marriages are to be seen as a crime against the public moral standards, the purchase of Christian slaves is prohibited to Jews, Jews are excluded from every public office. In the 5th Century the anti-Jewish laws appear in large numbers. Where the Christian orthodoxy was able to push / get through against the Christian heretics, the Jews were worse off, as a rule. Where the deity of Christ – like with several Christian groupings – was not emphasized that strong, where Jesus as a person was acknowledged in a different way, the tolerance towards the Jews was greater. There were other times and other attitudes. Pope Gregor (540-404) for example recommended protection also for the free practising of the religion of the Jews.

But the Church of Jesus Christ never lost the marks of anti-Judaism that can be found in a classical way with the preacher Johannes Chrysostomus (354-407). He formulates momentous sentences that belong to the theological roots of every anti-Semitism: “ Because you killed Jesus Christ, because you raised a hand against the Lord, because you shed His precious blood, therefore there is no improvement anymore, no forgiveness and also no apology.”

So, the Christian theology is – how bad that may be – connected with anti-Judaism, which is to be regarded as a root of National Socialist anti-Semitism. Maybe this is the most serious root cause of all.

Jesus – a Jew of His time

A central question is the one who Jesus was, how He considered Himself to be. Historically almost certainly proven, He considered Himself not as the Messiah, but maybe as the decisive person calling in the last few hours – before the dawn of the reign of God. The coming human-son will profess to Him, or rather the people will be judged after their attitude towards Him. (MK 8, 38).

Jesus therefore had an eschatological important function, without doubt also because of His own attitude, but it is not defined very precisely and is neither able to find common ground in one idea nor in a title: Son of God, Lamb of God, High Priest, Word, Lord – all these are titles that describe what He later meant for the people, they are interpretations of His authority. Substantial statements are not included in these titles initially.

But these titles have become substantial statements during history, as we can recognize with Melito of Sardes. With that, the great problem between Christians and Jews began. Because if He is the Son of God in a substantial way, then Jesus at least co-murdered God or collaborated on the killing of the Son of God. And if they killed God’s Son – so God – what else then could save them? The Christological dogma therefore gains a priori an anti-Judaist distinctness, that is becoming a root of anti-Semitism in the effective history.

Jesus was a Jew of His time – completely: in ethnical respects, grammatically / stylistically, culturally – in midst of different, partly competing groupings, in the various traditions of faith of His people. The relationship between Jesus / the Jesus Movement and the various groupings of Jewry of that time was different, namely – depending on the grouping – friendly or controversial. The relationship to the Pharisees was friendly, but the relationship to the Sadducees was rather distant. The relationship to the parish of Qumran is to be described as relatively close – in view of their radicalism, their picture of mankind, their *near-expectation*. But the relationship to their isolation, their esotericism, their deviational ecclesiastical history was coined with distance and rejection.

The relationship of the Jesus-Movement and of Jesus Himself to John the Baptist and to the Baptist-Movement was characterized by great closeness. But subsequently both

movements, both persons went their own, very different way. John went into the desert, the people came to him. But Jesus went to the people, in the towns and villages and announced to them with His words and His action the kind closeness of God. But both persons and movements are movements of rejuvenation and repentance of the Jewry of that time. There is no probable relationship to the Hellenists and aristocrats of this time, just as to the people of the Diaspora.

Some influential representatives of Jewry of that time obviously looked for His closeness: Nikodemus, Joseph of Arimathea. Totally standing out, however, was His closeness to religiously and socially downgraded people, His closeness to children and women.

The death of Jesus on the cross is the consequence of political and religious reservations about Him as a person. The Jewish upper-class and the Romans obviously had a common interest in this way of ending. The crucifixion is a genuine Roman punishment. The Romans probably considered Him to be a Jewish resistance fighter / partisan (Zelotes).

For His supporters / followers, for His movement, the death of Jesus was a catastrophe and at first nearly led to a total disbanding of this movement. The so-called Resurrection-experiences and reflecting interpretations of His work and His death, but also of Him as a person lead to a change. Here and there, at different places, also on the background of different experiences, the Jesus-supporters / followers assemble after His death. They are reflecting the experiences with Him, they further announce His message, others expect His return, are making new experiences with His belief / faith and with His life. Initially, the Jesus-movement is a trend / tendency within Jewry, an apocalyptic-messianic sect. Then there appear the Samaritans, the Diaspora-Jews, Hellenistic-Jews and become Christians. They bring themselves into the Jesus-movement with their advanced comprehension / understanding and their history. They formulate their experiences in their language – coming from their tradition. Non-circumcised Gojims / pagans become members of the parish. With that, the rift between Jewry and Christianity is finally reinforced.

Certain groupings of the early Jew-Christianity try hard to maintain the proximity of Jewry, to stay within Jewish life and culture – out of religious conviction, but others maybe also out of political calculation. Jewry still was, despite certain animosities and the anti-Judaism that existed in principle in the Roman Empire as well, a legitimized religion. Within the framework of Jewry you enjoyed the protection of a certain legitimacy (Gal 6). Jewry also was kind of attractive to the young Christendom. Within Jewry you had a certain protection. Jewry was a legal religion for sure until the year 70, but also until the year 135. Practically, the Jews had a privileged status. Their practice of religion was accepted – on condition that it will be prayed for the Emperor in the temple. Only since 70, but at the latest since 135 a. C., everything changed. Until the year 70, it was not inopportune / inconvenient for a Christian to stay within the Jewish framework. They had a legal share of the position of Jewry in the Roman Empire. And that is why some light heartedly were saying “yes” to the circumcision.

The break with Jewry through Paul

With his theology, Paul set the course for a new development. Through him, Christianity became an independent religion, with maintenance of the continuation with Jewry in

eschatological perspective (Rom 9-11). But at the same time his theology was the break with the traditional Jewry and with the Jew-Christianity. Paul went through / made his own development in the question of the relationships and internal interconnection of Christ-belief and Jewry. He comes from the *Pharisaic Jewry*, namely as a Diaspora-Jew, who is educated in a Hellenistic way. He represents a *Pharisaic Jewry*, maybe he performs a control-function within the Jewish community and he also becomes an enthusiastic pursuer of groupings with different opinions. Then he has a mystic(al) Christ-experience and breaks with the *Pharisaic Jewry*. He becomes a pagan-missionary – without obeying the Jewish ritual law. That is why he also does not demand its obeying from others anymore. That gives him the experience of massive Jewish contradiction. Jewish communities probably worked together with the pagan authorities against Paul and his mission (1 Thes 2, 13ff). Out of that, conflicts were developing with Jew-Christians on several levels: in his mission communities, also at the Council of Apostles, at the intended handing over of the money-collection in Jerusalem or already with the question, if the municipality of Jerusalem will / is going to accept the money from the pagan-Christian communities (Rom 15, 31).

ATTENTION: Parishes sind Pfarrgemeinden, bei jüdischen Gemeinden sollte ein anderes Wort benutzt werden! Korrigiere es!

1.Thes 2, 13-16; Gal 6,12 ff; 2.Kor 3, 12 ff; Rom 9-11 mark stations of the struggle of Paul for the separation from the ritual law and from the Thora as a curing, but at the same time stations of the struggling for an own point of view prevailed / determined by the Messiah-experience and for the independence of the Christian church. Simultaneously it was a matter of safeguarding the continuity with the Jewish people, with the Promise and the Thora.

The Christian-Jewish relationship in the Gospels

The representatives of Jewry are – after the destruction of the temple during the Jewish-Roman war – brought into contradiction to Jesus in a clear way in the Gospels. Jesus though doubtlessly is close to the Pharisees – Disputes between Him and the Pharisees are not disputes against the Jews, but between Jews. The Gospels change that point of view.

The Passion-Story of the oldest Gospel of Mark already has an anti-Jewish tone, even more the version of Matthew with the call of the Jews, established by him: “May His blood come over us and our children” (Mt 27,25).

This tradition contains, beside and in the defence of the suffering of Jesus and the assimilation of grief of the Jesus-followers, the aggression against Jewry. *Matthew leaves the Jewry behind himself.*

The Gospel of John intensifies this tendency, formulates everything even more fundamental: The Jews appear, in that brusque, dualism-like sounding verse (8,37-46), as sons of Satan, but the Gospel of John still knows in the background, that salvation comes from the Jews (4,22).

Of course the synagogue itself has clearly fixed the boundaries / limits to this basic-Christian grouping that breaks up the Jewish form of religion (among others Schmone Esre), but

otherwise everything keeps within the same bounds for the time being. The Gospel of John therefore already looks back on the banishment / exclusion of the Christians from the synagogues, and in the other Gospels there are also limits of that kind. Christianity formulates itself afterwards increasingly anti-Jewish, apart from some exceptions.

Really excessive in its anti-Judaism is the Apocalypse of John – despite its apocalyptic character, that can only be understood and interpreted as being from Jewish roots. *The Epheser-letter* is an important attempt from the school of Paul to keep at least the unity of Jew-Christians and Pagan-Christians, but the Jew-Christians doubtlessly already are in a hopeless offside-position. The historical work of Luke after all endeavours to get a positive sight and representation for the benefit of Rome. So here, like in the Gospel of John as well, *Pilatus* is described much more likeable / pleasant as he was in real life (John 18, 33ff).

After 70, Jewry and Christianity obviously separate for good. Jew-Christianity afterwards is on the edge of history and leads a life on the verge of the church in the following time, but likewise on the verge of Jewry. In the following period, Jewry distances itself more sharply from Christianity. In the revolt / rebellion / uprising of Bar-Kochba Christians maybe are even bothered by Jews, because they do not go along with the militant turn against Rome.

In spite of the hostility of the Romans against Christianity, Christianity moves towards the Roman Empire since the 2nd Century. After a long period of suffering, it obtains its legacy under Constantine, later it becomes state religion / official religion. Soon after the victory of Constantine, laws against Jews are issued, history takes its course until the Shoah in the 20th Century.

Christology, Christianity does not necessarily have to be anti-Jewish – otherwise there would not have been Jewish Christians and Jew-Christians – but the metaphysical Christology with its explications practically was. The more metaphysical it was formulated, the more sharp , as a rule, was the opposition against the Jewish disbelief (Gospel of John). By having a fundamental critical sight, we are able to recognize lines of development and their consequences today – and nowadays we are also sensitized by the catastrophes and crisis of latest / modern history.

Christology without anti-Judaism

The significance of Jesus today is to be formulated without an anti-Jewish drawback, only in this way it is thinkable and defensible. Today Jews formulate their understanding of Jesus: The Christian statement about Jesus, the Christology, can only be expressed today in conversation with Jews. Christology is to be understood as Jesus-lyric, as a symbolic, metaphorical language, as poetry of belief that is to be questioned / examined about anti-Jewish implications very exactly. The area of common ground between Christians and Jews is bigger / greater than the differences: Christians and Jews belong to one ecumenical *community??* , Christians cannot separate themselves from the root of Jewry – despite many problems and disagreements.

Through Jesus shines the light of God to us, the believers of all nations, that came – in all its refraction – with Him and through our Jewish brothers and sisters to us. We have become a

part of their history, through them we are a part of the history of God with man: For the curing of man, for the protection of man, of humanity and for the protection of life. We call ourselves to account for *the "chain of guilt"* towards the Jewish people and we will do our best that once and now confidence may grow between Christians and Jews.

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