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Heroic Collective Action: A People's Blessing?

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Is contemporary reflection on heroism out of balance, placing far too much emphasis on the activity of individuals rather than on that of groups or communities? And is that distorting perspective all too often imposed on the development of Jewish-Christian relations as well? In viewing the progress of the contemporary dialogue, do we automatically think of figures such as Pope John XXIII and Jules Isaac rather than the widespread networks that have transformed the conversation between Jews and Christians? Certainly such an approach is understandable, for the last century saw more than its fair share of powerful leaders who might have fostered an excessive emphasis on individuals. A quick review would call up such heroic figures as Mahatma Gandhi, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Pope John Paul II, David Ben-Gurion, Nelson Mandela. And then, of course, there were the dictators: Adolf Hitler, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin.

This essay proposes a shift of focus to a greater appreciation of heroic collective action without denying its relationship to leaders, many of whom, though, are anonymous. It is a philosophical exercise that certainly reflects my desire to do justice to the zeitgeist of 1989 and perhaps even to that of 2011 although, still in its midst, it is too early to comment on this year. The events of 1989 invite all of us to an Augustinian curiosity, to imitate him in doing a history of the present. Augustine asked, What does the fall of Rome mean spiritually for us who are living through this dramatic event? How did it come about? Let us in turn ask, "What does the fall of the Berlin Wall or of Communism, or of ancient barriers between Christians and Jews mean for us spiritually? How should we account for their collapse and, most importantly, what should we learn about the processes that transformed them?"

In trying to respond to these questions, I became aware of how much my own attitude to action and change has been shaped by revolutions, even before those of 1989: there was

the 1956 Hungarian revolution, the bloody photos from which frightened me as a youngster; the civil rights, women's and anti-war movements of the fifties, sixties and seventies; the general cultural upheavals of the nineteen sixties; the Roman Catholic Revolution carried forward by the Vatican Council; the Iranian Revolution which I followed during my student years in Paris where Michel Foucault was an important commentator on that event; the Philippine Revolution of 1986; and, finally, the Arab revolutions of 2011. Living through such important events, even from afar, may generate a foolish confidence that one is able to grasp how such transformative episodes are produced. The two thinkers upon whom I most rely in reflecting about historical change perhaps do not ease this problem because Hannah Arendt was sharply criticized for her view of the Hungarian Revolution and Michel Foucault was mocked for his writings on the Iranian revolution.¹

There are other developments that seem to me at least also to mandate careful scrutiny of the intellectual resources we have for understanding radical change. One is the spectacle afforded by the failure of the field of Russian Studies to discern, let alone explain, the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union. There is an even more compelling reason for us who are occupied by the humanities to reconsider how we approach heroism: what I will call the "Great Complicity," the enthusiastic engagement of so many trained by our traditional philosophical and theological texts in the intellectual fantasies of Fascism, Marxism and National Socialism. Even as they promoted political practices that savaged people's lives, Fascist, Marxist, and Nazi thinkers laid claim to an innocence, to a search for truth that they said

¹ On Arendt as political commentator, see Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992) especially 235-238, and Walter Laqueur, "The Arendt Cult," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, 4 (1998): 483-496. Several of the essays attacking Foucault on Iran may be found in *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, ed. Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

acquitted them from the consequences for others of their personal searches. Was it perhaps the desire for that justification that led philosophers to cast such a dark view on the crowd in history, the masses in society?² Doesn't that great complicity mandate that intellectual bias be a special object of philosophical examination in the 21st century?

Some might retort, was it not the interest in action itself that subverted philosophy's intellectual independence in the first place? I hope not but we should recognize that ours must be a certain type of personal interest, namely, that we become aware of the powers operating on us and how those powers shape our judgments. Here I think of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and his prayer of praise to the prison because he recognized that, if he had not been arrested and imprisoned, he would never have appreciated the character of his society.³

Solzhenitsyn might seem, however, a contrast to my focus here which is on collective action because he was so obviously an heroic individual. It is important to recognize, however, that while he was certainly himself heroic, his self-understanding was as a witness to those millions with whom he shared the fate of the Gulag Archipelago. Both foe and friend acknowledged this collective weight. One of the most remarkable set of documents to be read from the previous century may be the astonishing discussions about Solzhenitsyn among his foes, the top leaders of the Soviet Union. It is difficult to capture the fear and anxiety this superpower's leaders felt before this writer-witness. Let me cite an excerpt from the minutes of the January 7, 1974 Politburo meeting over which Chairman Brezhnev presided. The speaker is Yuri Andropov, later to succeed Brezhnev as the leader of the Soviet Union itself: "His

² One thinks for example of such works as José Ortega y Gasset's *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Norton, 1932).

³ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago 1918-1956* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), II:615-617.

Gulag Archipelago is not a work of fiction; it is a political document. This is dangerous...On the whole, there are hundreds and thousands of people among whom Solzhenitsyn will find support."⁴ That Solzhenitsyn's threat was this collective presence was also the judgment of a friend, one of the principal architects of the Czechoslovakian "velvet revolution." Václav Havel wrote that Solzhenitsyn's political influence "does not reside in some exclusive political power he possesses as an individual, but in the experience of those millions of Gulag victims which he simply amplified and communicated to millions of other people of good will."⁵

The mere desire to understand does not guarantee, of course, access to reality. One need only recall the large scale Eastern European uprisings of 1989. Despite what was so visible on the television or film screens, commentators all too often led us to subordinate these popular movements to some individual Leader. Who was responsible for them and the fall of Communism, they asked? Was it Gorbachev? Ronald Reagan? Pope John Paul II? In an interview in November of 2009, Lech Walesa, one of the founders of Solidarity and later President of Poland, was sharply critical of that line of questioning. He said:

That's why when I see images of Bush, Kohl and Gorbachev under the headline "Three Fathers of the Fall of the Wall," it looks more like chance to me than anything. They merely implemented the desires expressed by the people...In truth, they were only accidental fathers of the fall of the Wall—forced into action by the masses... There is a risk right now that we might lose the victory that we fought so hard for. The question is whether we

⁴ *The Solzhenitsyn Files*, ed. Michael Scammell (Chicago: edition q, inc., 1995), document 99, 284.

⁵ Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. John Keane (Armonk, N.Y.:M.E. Sharpe, Inc.), 60.

have learned from our experiences or whether we need another whack upside the head from history. The masses learned, but after the victory the masses handed power back to the politicians. And they forgot that it was we who won the victory. We might have to set the masses in motion once again.⁶

Are we, especially those of us trained in Western intellectual traditions, prejudiced against the exploration and crediting of collective action? The general lure of the isolated hero may be one source of this bias. Just recall the iconic image of the sole dissident standing in front of a column of tanks in Tiananmen Square in June, 1989.⁷ But are there far more entrenched roots for our failure to acknowledge collective action than the appeal of courageous individuals? Is it in part the legacy of our very vision of enlightenment descended from Socrates and Plato and the parable of the cave? Plato has only one prisoner set free in the story and Socrates tells us of that individual's return to the others in the cave: "They would laugh at him and say that he had gone up only to come back with his sight ruined; it was worth no one's while even to attempt the ascent. If they could lay hands on the man who was trying to set them free and lead them up, they would kill him."⁸ Again here is Walesa, who spoke of the popular reaction to the 1979 visit to Poland of John-Paul II: "We found that there were millions of us. For the first time, the communists were not able to stage a demonstration that was larger than ours. As a result,

they felt weak, and this was an important element in their ultimate defeat."⁹

Interestingly, a major commentator on the 1989 events, Timothy Garton Ash, agrees with Walesa. "If I was forced to name a single date," he writes, "for the 'beginning of the end' in this *inner* history of Eastern Europe, it would be June 1979...I do believe that the Pope's first great pilgrimage to Poland was that turning point. Here, for the first time, we saw that massive, sustained, yet supremely peaceful and self-disciplined manifestation of social unity, the gentle crowd against the Party-state, which was both the hallmark and the essential domestic catalyst of change in 1989..."¹⁰

Does expectation that there will be a single great leader, a possible intellectual inheritance for both Christians and Jews from the messianic dream of a Savior, distort their vision of the good as well? And does that, in turn, impel us to confine the face of evil to the visages of a Hitler, a Stalin, a Mao? If I have learned anything from historical investigations of Hitler, it is that he cannot be understood apart from the elites who empowered him. Wasn't Hitler's greatest talent the ability to recognize others' weaknesses of character and to persuade people to corrupt themselves?

There are several examples of successful collective action that, cumulatively, should complement traditional regard for individual heroes. They are presented here as stimulants for how we might more adequately approach the history of Jewish-Christian relations. In addition to the place occupied in that history by official statements and particular leaders, these examples recommend a path of more intensive scrutiny for the social and cultural interactions of average Jews and Christians.

⁶ Lech Walesa, "It's Good that Gorbachev Was a Weak Politician," *Spiegel Online* interview with L. Walesa, (November 6, 2009), (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,659752,00.html>), accessed December 14, 2011.

⁷ "Tiananmen Square Protester," (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdKgtlenuWl>), accessed December 14, 2011.

⁸ *The Republic*, Book VII, 514 A-521 B.

⁹ Lech Walesa, "Gorbachev."

¹⁰ Timothy Garton Ash, *We the People: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin & Prague* (Cambridge: Granta Books, 1990), 133.

That is a project for the future but, without it, one might argue the development of Jewish-Christian relations is misunderstood. The four examples are: 1) the Yad Vashem project of recognizing the "Righteous Among the Nations"; 2) the Hungarian Revolution; 3) the development of religious toleration; and 4) the place the Holocaust has taken on in contemporary reflection.

1) I am currently studying a very admirable group of people who risked or lost their lives attempting to save Jewish life during the Holocaust. The State of Israel has named them the "Righteous Among the Nations" and, since 1953, it has tried to identify and honor these righteous. In recent years I have held a regular experiment with students who take my Holocaust-related courses. On the first class day I ask them to estimate how many righteous people Israel has discovered. Almost without exception my students give figures far, far lower than the actual number. Last year, for example, only two students out of 30 guessed a higher number; the other students gave estimates of 25, 50, a few hundred or a thousand. As of 2010 the actual number is over 23,788 and Yad Vashem, the Israeli institution charged with the responsibility for certifying these heroes, judges that that figure represents but a small percentage of those who should be honored.¹¹ How do we account for this discrepancy between the guessed and the actual numbers? Are we inculcated with a view of collective human failure during that period? Here is the judgment of the very heroic Polish resister, Jan Karski: It "is not true that the Jews were totally abandoned. Over half a million Jews survived the Holocaust in Europe. Someone helped them: nuns and peasants,

¹¹ See "The Righteous Among the Nations: About the Righteous, Statistics," <http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/righteous/statistics.asp> (accessed December 14, 2011). In conversations with staff at Yad Vashem I was given the figure that perhaps only 10% have been recognized of those who would qualify for the honor. Yad Vashem has erected a "Memorial to the Anonymous Rescuer" on its campus to call attention to this population.

workers and underground organizations." The Jews "were abandoned by governments, social structures, church hierarchies, but not by ordinary men and women. The organized structures fell short of expectation, but not ordinary people. And there were millions of such people."¹²

It is important to recall as well that often networks of people were required to save one individual life and, thus, even Yad Vashem's recognition of individual heroes may obscure the communities that were indispensable for their heroic actions. Far more extensive would be those, of course, who would need to be recognized for creating a moral climate in which rescue of the vulnerable was perceived as a duty. The best example of these broader networks is given by the nation of Denmark where more than 90% of the Jews were saved through the collective action of numberless Danish citizens. Yad Vashem's published encyclopedia of heroic action states, "In fact, the entire Danish nation is worthy of receiving the title, Righteous Among Nations. Yad Vashem expressed its recognition of the Danish people's rescue operation with a special plaque in the garden of the Righteous Among the Nations..."¹³

2) The Hungarian Revolution. Few philosophers have sought a model of collective action that does justice to people's freedom to act as a group. Prominent among them is Hannah Arendt. While other commentators saw only the defeat of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, it was she who argued for its significance as a spontaneous outburst of the human yearning for freedom and truth. She wrote, "The amazing thing about the Hungarian revolution is that there was no civil war. For the Hungarian army disintegrated in hours and the dictatorship was stripped of all power in a couple of days. No group, no class in

¹² "The Mission That Failed, A Polish Courier Who Tried to Help the Jews: An Interview with Jan Karski," *Dissent* (Summer, 1987), 334.

¹³ *Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations, Europe (Part I)*, ed. Israel Gutman (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2007), LII.

the nation opposed the will of the people once it had become known and its voice had been heard in the market place.” She cites with approval an Hungarian professor’s remark: “It was unique in history, that the Hungarian revolution had no leaders. It was not organized; it was not centrally directed. The will for freedom was the moving force in every action.” It is astonishing at how prophetic her view turned out to be. Although the Communist system survived in 1956, she thought that year’s revolutionary events should not be forgotten: “If they promise anything at all, it is much rather a sudden and dramatic collapse of the whole regime than a gradual normalization.”¹⁴

Arendt’s most penetrating appreciation of collective action is her treatment of civil disobedience and its difference from conscientious objection. Whereas the latter is individual and rooted in conscience, the former is collective in nature and political in its ambition. She follows Tocqueville in paying tribute to the novelty of America’s emphasis on voluntary associations and the power they exhibit. Of civil disobedience she writes:

The greatest fallacy in the present debate seems to me the assumption that we are dealing with individuals, who pit themselves subjectively and conscientiously against the laws and customs of the community—an assumption that is shared by the defenders and detractors of civil disobedience. The fact is that we are dealing with organized minorities, who stand against assumed inarticulate, though hardly ‘silent’ majorities, and I think it is undeniable that these majorities have changed in mood and opinion to an astounding degree under the pressure of the minorities.¹⁵

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: World Publishing, 1958), 496, 482, 510.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, “Civil Disobedience,” *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), 98-99.

3) Religious Toleration. It is urgent that our world think about issues of religious toleration. Perhaps the growth toward toleration of different religions is the premier example of an achievement of collective action. Yet those traditional histories that emphasize the progressive triumph of ideas taught by figures such as Locke, Voltaire, and Madison most often ignore this. A recently published alternative history by Benjamin Kaplan encourages a shift of focus. He argues that people developed practices that made it possible for different religious communities to live in peaceful existence without first creating the intellectual convictions that we tend to presume as essential conditions for that state. In fact there was a “nitty-gritty practice of toleration” that marked Europe with “confessional coexistence” or “religious pluralism” well before the modern notion of toleration developed. According to Kaplan, religious tolerance was a social practice, a “form of behavior: peaceful coexistence with others who adhered to a different religion.” It:

required no “principle of mutual acceptance,” much less an embrace of diversity for its own sake, as our modern concept of tolerance presumes. Despite the arguments of the philosophers, most Europeans continued to the very end of the early modern era to use the word *tolerate* in its traditional meaning: to suffer, endure, or put up with something objectionable. It was a pragmatic move, a grudging acceptance of unpleasant realities, not a positive virtue. In its very enactment the people doing the tolerating made powerful, if implicit, claims about the truth of their own religion and the false, deviant character of others’.¹⁶

The perspective of collective action seems invited by the complexity of our cultural development. As Kaplan writes:

¹⁶ Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Ma: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 8, 11, see 336.

Early modern Europe had both its butchers and its martyrs, whose actions stunned contemporaries and left indelible marks on their culture. But the vast majority were neither, nor did their conceptions of Christian piety oblige them to be. Even when Europe's churches preached intolerance most vehemently, they also taught countervailing values, like love for one's neighbor and respect for the law. Religious obligations and secular commitments were difficult to disentangle in early modern culture. Honor, loyalty, friendship, affection, kinship, civic duty, devotion to the common weal: these bonds had themselves a sacred character that might reinforce or complicate a person's religious allegiance. And even when most at odds, rival confessions continued to share a common Christian heritage, derived from antiquity and the Middle Ages, just as Christians, Jews, and Muslims shared a common scriptural one.¹⁷

Even one of those fierce seventeenth-century Jesuits who was charged with rolling back the Protestant Reformation could say of the Protestants: that "their heresy is bad, but they are good neighbors and brethren, to whom we are linked by bonds of love in the common fatherland."¹⁸ Considering our current global situation, this history provides grounds for hope. Alternative religious communities and the cultures that arise from them are able to live together in peace and mutual respect. Strictly secular ideologies are neither necessary nor, arguably, as strong as religious faiths in grounding practices of toleration and reconciliation.

4) The Holocaust. A final example of collective action is the place that the Holocaust (Shoah) has taken in contemporary historical consciousness and moral reflection. Although

Karl Jaspers had raised the question of German guilt for Nazi crimes in the immediate aftermath of the war, his lectures stand out because they were so rare. Just the desire to investigate the genocide was cause for suspicion. This was true even in the United States: Raul Hilberg, the first outstanding Holocaust historian, tells us in his memoirs how he approached Franz Neumann in the 1950s at Columbia University to direct his dissertation on the destruction of European Jews. Hilberg writes, "Neumann said yes, but he knew that at this moment I was separating myself from the mainstream of academic research to tread in territory that had been avoided by the academic world and the public alike. What he said to me in three words was, 'It's your funeral.'"¹⁹

When we turn to German society, we must recognize that there has been a remarkable growth in that nation's understanding of and remorse for the Holocaust. Surveys of Israeli popular opinion regularly demonstrate high regard for how Germany has come to grips with its 20th-century history, an astonishing tribute to the possibilities for reconciliation between nations. Avi Primor, the former Israeli ambassador to Germany, said in 2008, "Where in the world has one ever seen a nation that erects memorials to immortalize its own shame? Only the Germans had the bravery and the humility."²⁰ Although most of us are probably more familiar with the frequently decried immediate postwar silence among Germans, we should educate ourselves more about the networks of Germans who were not silent and who spoke out of a deep personal affection for the German-Jewish culture that had thrived in Germany before the Nazi era. "Participation in or knowledge of Nazi crimes led thousands of their compatriots to postwar silence. But the experience of shared persecution and witness to the persecution of others was a common denominator for the founders of both

¹⁷ Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 9.

¹⁸ Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 76.

¹⁹ Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 66.

²⁰ Cited in Nicholas Kulish, "75 Years After Hitler's Ascent, A Germany that Won't Forget," *The New York Times* (January 29, 2008), A 1 & 4.

Germanys. After the war these shared experiences led them to express solidarity with Nazism's victims."²¹ This collective awareness evolved into the practical proposal of West Germany's massive reparation payments as well as the symbolic act of constructing a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in the very heart of the reunited Berlin's government quarter.

Perhaps it is in the development of a more critical perspective within both Protestant and Catholic Churches on their histories with and attitudes toward Jews that we find one of the greatest achievements of the shared activity of the group. Let me focus on Catholicism and the need to place its development within a broader collective perspective. Initial Papal statements at the end of the war provide reasons for why the Catholic Church delayed confronting its failures of conduct during the period of National Socialism. Pope Pius XII's address to the College of Cardinals in June 1945 set the tone for the Vatican's approach to Catholic activity during the Holocaust for the following thirteen years. The speech included a strong defense of the Concordat that he had negotiated with the Nazi government in 1933. He presented the Church as a victim, as a survivor of the "sorrowful passion" which Nazi enmity forced upon it. At the same time he portrayed the Church as a unified force of resistance to Nazi attacks, declaring, "To resist such attacks millions of courageous Catholics, men and women, closed their ranks around their Bishops, whose valiant and severe pronouncements never failed to resound even in these last years of war."²²

²¹ Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 376. It would go beyond the scope of my essay to draw the sharp distinctions that would need to be made between the two postwar German states in their approaches to the Holocaust. West Germany was far more adequate in recognizing its responsibilities than was the Communist German Democratic Republic.

²² Pius XII, "Nazism and Peace" (June 2, 1945) in *The Catholic Mind* 43, 992 (August, 1945): 454, 451. I develop the Catholic response to the Shoah at greater length in J. Bernauer, "The Holocaust and the Search for For-

The only comment that suggested a less than heroic performance came when the Pope spoke of the incompatibility of pagan Nazism and Catholicism and admitted that not all Catholics had understood that at the time. He said, "Some even among the faithful themselves were too blinded by their prejudices or allured by political advantage."²³ This did not lead to any conviction about a new relationship with the Jews as is shown in the fact that the one Catholic group working in Germany for improved Catholic-Jewish relations received a warning from the Vatican in 1950 that dialogue between the two faiths risked the danger of making it appear as if the two religions were equal.²⁴ An examination of the reasons for Pope Pius XII's general attitude at this time is beyond the scope of this paper but the effect of his strategy was to encourage German Church leaders to rejoice in the triumphant survival of the Church and to stress their own sufferings under the Nazis rather than to acknowledge their own failures during that period.²⁵ They claimed that they did not wish to further demoralize or divide their people over the issue of what should have been done during the Nazi years.²⁶ The very real menace that the Soviet Union represented at that time both sustained the anxiety about Communism which the National Socialists had exploited so effectively and also encouraged people to focus on the future.²⁷

giveness: An Invitation to the Society of Jesus?" *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 36:2 (Summer, 2004) 1-41.

²³ Pius XII, "Nazism and Peace," 452.

²⁴ See Michael Phayer, *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 189-190, 207.

²⁵ See Damian van Melis, "'Strengthened and Purified Through Ordeal by Fire': Ecclesiastical Triumphalism in the Ruins of Europe," *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231-241.

²⁶ Heinz Hürten, *Deutsche Katholiken 1918-1945* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1992), 542-558.

²⁷ Horst Heitzer, "Deutscher Katholizismus und 'Bolschewismusgefahr' bis 1933," *Historisches Jahrbuch* II, 103 (1993): 355-387.

Nevertheless, there were strong German Catholic voices demanding a more self-critical examination.²⁸ Although Pope Pius XII was beloved by the German bishops, a brief struggle may nevertheless be detected in the various drafts of the bishops' first pastoral letter after the war which they issued at Fulda on August 23, 1945. As a result of Berlin's Bishop Konrad von Preysing's insistence, a much stronger statement was included in the final version than had been anticipated. It reads, "We deeply deplore that many Germans, even of our own ranks, allowed themselves to be misled by the false teachings of national socialism, remaining indifferent to the crimes against human freedom and human dignity; many abetted crimes by their attitude; many became criminals themselves."²⁹ This tone was not to be preserved in later statements which embraced general denials of Catholic responsibility and particular defenses of their episcopal conduct. It is striking that there is only one other collective statement of regret in these immediate postwar years. "The 1948 statement of the Mainz *Katholikentag* contritely admitted crimes against 'the people of Jewish stock'."³⁰

²⁸ For example, see Vera Bücker, *Die Schulddiskussion im deutschen Katholizismus nach 1945* (Bochum: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1989) and Konrad Repgen, "Die Erfahrung des Dritten Reiches und das Selbstverständnis der deutschen Katholiken nach 1945," *Die Zeit nach 1945 als Thema kirchlicher Zeitgeschichte*, ed. Victor Conzemius, M. Greschat and H. Kocher (Göttingen: Vandhoeck and Ruprecht, 1988), 127-179. More recently, two fine collections of essays appeared that examine Christian failures in the Nazi period: *Die katholische Schuld? Katholizismus im Dritten Reich zwischen Arrangement und Widerstand*, ed. Rainer Bendel (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2002) and *Kirche der Sünder—Sündige Kirche: Beispiele für den Umgang mit Schuld nach 1945*, ed. Rainer Bendel (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000).

²⁹ "Pastoral" of the German Bishops at Fulda (Aug. 23, 1945) in *The Catholic Mind* 43, 995 (November, 1945): 692. For a discussion of the drafts, see Michael Phayer, "The Postwar German Catholic Debate Over Holocaust Guilt," *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 8:2 (1995): 429-430.

³⁰ Michael Phayer, "The German Catholic Church After the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 10: 2 (Fall, 1996): 154. The statement may be found in *Die Kirchen und das Judentum: Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985*, ed.

However, outside the official statements, there was lively discussion among German Catholics. Konrad Adenauer, who was to become the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic, sent a letter to a Bonn pastor on February 23, 1946, in which he wrote:

The German people, also for the most part its bishops and priests, cooperated in the National Socialist agitation. It permitted itself to be Nazified without offering resistance—yes, even with enthusiasm. Therein lies its guilt...I believe that if the bishops had altogether on a given day spoken out from their pulpits in opposition, much could have been avoided. That did not happen and there is no excuse for it. To the contrary, had the bishops been thrown into prison or concentration camps, that would not have been a misfortune.³¹

Even earlier a 1945 statement of a group of Rhineland Catholics admitted that they had not anticipated how Nazi anti-semitism could lead to gas chambers. There was also the very critical voice of an "Open Letter on the Church" by the Catholic spiritual writer Ida Friederike Goerres which appeared in 1946 and which attacked the German Catholic Church on a variety of fronts as "career minded prelates, a power hungry institution, authoritarian clergy, and tendencies toward mediocrity, insensitivity and triumphalism." A widely discussed article by the Catholic anti-Nazi writer Eugen Kogon, who had been imprisoned for almost six years at the Buchenwald concentration

Rolf Rendtorff and Hans Hermann Henrix (Paderborn: Verlag Bonifatius-Druckerei, 1989), 239-240.

³¹ Frank Buscher and Michael Phayer, "German Catholic Bishops and the Holocaust, 1940-1952," *German Studies Review* XI:3 (October, 1988): 485. Goerres letter appeared in a new journal, the *Frankfurter Hefte*. The German text may be found in *Die Kirchen im Dritten Reich*, volume 2, ed. George Denzler and Volker Fabricius (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984), 255.

camp, questioned the postwar moral authority of the German bishops as a result of their conduct during the Hitler regime.³²

An important window into the German bishops' view of this criticism appears in a fascinating, unpublished document which reports on an August 23, 1947 conversation between an official of the American Military Government and several German bishops. They strongly reject the criticisms of their conduct under the Nazis.³³ Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne, who was the titular head of the German Church at the time of the interview, asked his questioner, "Who has the right to demand that the bishops should have chosen a form of fight that would have sent them to the gallows with infallible certainty, and which would have resulted in a campaign of extermination against the church?" Bishop Albert Stohr of Mainz denied that the survivors of concentration camps were more courageous than the bishops whom they were now criticizing. He claimed, "Most of them were thrown in concentration camps against their will as a result of indirect utterances and secret actions. Also, many of them became victims of their own imprudence and rashness which have nothing to do with courage." Archbishop Lorenz Jaeger of Paderborn did voice the fear that, if the bishops had challenged the Nazi regime more forcefully, there was real danger that "many members of our church, who had been blinded and misled by a deceitful propaganda would all the

more have been driven into the arms of National Socialism by too sharp a language." Bishop Johannes Dietz of Fulda argued that the conduct of the German bishops followed the highest model: "The basically pastoral attitude of the church is taken from the higher example set by Jesus when he was brought before the High Priests, before King Herod, and Pilate."³⁴ This model of humility certainly reflected a Catholic theology which praised the cultivation of passive virtues as particularly appropriate for the Christian life; virtues such as obedience, patience, gentleness, mortification.³⁵ It did contrast, however, with the very aggressive approach the bishops took to the Allied authorities whom they denounced for the denazification program, for the war crimes trials the Allies were conducting and to whom they submitted pleas for leniency for some of the most notorious Nazi criminals.³⁶ All too often the determination of the bishops to repudiate any notion of collective guilt encouraged Catholics to excuse themselves of moral responsibility for the Nazi phenomenon.³⁷

After 1959 there was an amazing transformation in the German Episcopacy's attitude toward the Holocaust. Various reasons account for the change. Pope Pius XII had passed

³² Phayer, "The Postwar German Catholic Debate Over Holocaust Guilt," 430-432. Kogon was the author of the first major study of the concentration camp world, *The Theory and Practice of Hell* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1950).

³³ A copy of the document, "The Catholic Church and Dr. Kogon" is in the John Riedel Papers, series 1, box 2, Catholic Church and Nazism File in the Archives of Marquette University. Riedel was Chief of Catholic Affairs for the Office of Military Government for Germany from 1946 to 1948 and later a professor of philosophy at Marquette. The official was Richard Akselrad. My attention was called to this by Michael Phayer's article, "The Postwar German Catholic Debate Over Holocaust Guilt," 435-436. I want to thank Marquette for giving me access to these papers.

³⁴ "The Catholic Church and Dr. Kogon," 2-4.

³⁵ See Jakob Nötges, *Nationalsozialismus und Katholizismus* (Cologne: Gide Verlag, 1931), especially 193-195.

³⁶ For this see Phayer, "The Postwar German Catholic Debate Over Holocaust Guilt," and Frank Buscher and Michael Phayer, "German Catholic Bishops and the Holocaust, 1940-1952" *German Studies Review* XI, 3 (October, 1988): 463-485. Making pleas for Nazi war criminals was not just a Catholic phenomenon as Robert Webster shows in his "Opposing 'Victor's Justice': German Protestant Churchmen and Convicted War Criminals in Western Europe after 1945," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 15:1 (Spring, 2001): 47-69.

³⁷ See Karen Riechert, "Der Umgang der katholischen Kirche mit historischer und juristischer Schuld anlässlich der Nürnberger Hauptkriegsverbrecherprozesse." in *Siegerin in Trümmern: Die Rolle der katholischen Kirche in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, ed. Joachim Köhler and Damian van Melis (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1998), 18-41.

away the year before; almost all of the bishops who had lived during the Third Reich had either died or been replaced; most importantly, Germans themselves were conducting trials of fellow Germans who had committed atrocities during the war.³⁸ On the occasion of the Eichmann Trial in 1961, the German bishops requested atonement for the crimes against the Jewish people and composed a prayer for those who had been murdered. This request for atonement was repeated a year later in a pastoral letter released on the eve of the Vatican Council's opening.³⁹ This period after Pius XII culminates at Vatican Council II when the German Jesuit Cardinal Augustin Bea gives a speech calling for a new relationship with the Jewish people and links his support for a Conciliar declaration to the Nazi genocide of the Jews.⁴⁰ When the declaration was adopted, the German bishops at the Council made a special statement welcoming it; they too pointed to the genocide as part of its context.⁴¹

Although this growth in understanding by church leaders is to be applauded, it is important to recognize yet again that this development and the fresh contours of the relationship between Christians and Jews are most adequately thought of as collective actions. They will not be appreciated if understood as primarily defined by an ecclesiastical teaching office imagined in the model of a pyramid or a hierarchy. "Nostra Aetate" is rooted in fundamental collective transformations within the Catholic world that, to my mind, are yet to be satisfactorily charted and analyzed. But in the front ranks of those

³⁸ "The German Catholic Church After the Holocaust," 161-162.

³⁹ *Die Kirchen und das Judentum: Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985*, 241-243.

⁴⁰ See Stjepan Schmidt, *Augustin Bea, the Cardinal of Unity* (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1992), 505-506.

⁴¹ *Die Kirchen und das Judentum: Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985*, 244. English translations of the major documents addressing Jewish-Christian relations may be found on the web site "Dialogika" (<http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources>).

transformations are the legions of scholars who have unearthed the Christian sources of practices that came to be murderous and who have made the Holocaust a pivotal event in human history. Perhaps Pope John Paul II revealed most dramatically the source of the current emotional and intellectual refiguring of Christian-Jewish relations in his 1988 visit to and lamentation at Austria's Mauthausen Concentration Camp. He pleaded with the dead:

Tell us, what direction should Europe and humanity follow "after Auschwitz"...and "after Mauthausen"? Is the direction we are following away from those past dreadful experiences the right one? Tell us, how should today's person be and how should this generation of humanity live in the wake of the great defeat of the human being? How must that person be? How much should be required of himself? Tell us, how must nations and societies be? How must Europe go on living? Speak, you have the right to do so—you who have suffered and lost your lives. We have the duty to listen to your testimony.⁴²

We may hope that their testimony will guide ecclesiastical as well as secular understanding in the future. That understanding must be in dialogue with the events of 1989 that, as one commentator opined, was the twentieth century's greatest year. It may be best described as the year that witnessed the heroic collective action of people who had drawn lessons from 20th century totalitarianisms. These anonymous communities had overthrown that century's worst burden, fear. And may that become a guiding blessing for our future in the upheavals in the Arab world, the social protests in Israel, the American "occupy" movements, and the political demonstrations in

⁴² "Lamentation at Mauthausen Concentration Camp, June 24, 1988" in *Spiritual Pilgrimage: Texts on Jews and Judaism 1979-1995*, ed. Eugene Fisher and Leon Klenicki (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 117-118.

Russia. Historical change has redirected our sight to the heroism of collective action.