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Conflict and Reconciliation between Christian Churches and Jewish Communities. Discrimination and Pogroms in Europe over Centuries and the Shoah as Disastrous Zenith

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Abstract

This article contains a presentation of the history of conflict and reconciliation in Europe between Christian Churches and Jewish communities in Europe. After a sort historical encounter, the author focuses on the reconciliation processes according to the protestant and Catholic tradition, as well as in ecumenical circles.

Keywords:

Conflict; Reconciliation; Jewish-Christian relations; Shoah; Pogrom; Discrimination

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I. The history of the Genocide in Europe in the first half of the 20th century

In the first half of the 20th Century, genocide occurred in unprecedented harshness and brutality. It seems as if, in the first half of the 20th Century, the struggle for freedom of the various nations and peoples, which initially had a positive effect in the 19th Century led to the exclusion of all population groups which were not identified as “clearly national”. And the “popular research” for supposedly culprits for lost wars has found a special confirmation in the marginalization of minorities. This identification of racial and cultural minorities with the allegedly suffering through these minorities was therefore predominantly the breeding ground in the “loser states” of the First World War in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Turkey¹. The main genocides of the first half of the 20th Century in Europe are the following²:

- the genocide of 1 to 1.5 million Armenians in 1894/95 and 1915/16;
- the genocide of about 6 million Jews in the time of National Socialism
- in Germany between 1941 and 1945 (Holocaust - Schoah);
- the genocide of about 500 thousand Sinti and Roma from 1939 to 1945;
- the genocide of about 100 thousand Crimean Tartars in 1944³;
- the “forgotten genocide”, the so called “Holodomor” (Ukrainian: Hunger Murder) of about 6 million Ukrainians in 1932/33 (other estimates amount to 14.5 million);
- the Genocide of about 8000 Bosniaks in Srebrenica-Serbia in 1995 (at the end of 20th Century);

¹ This includes the Soviet Union as a successor state of the Russian Empire, with the loss of territories in the West, especially the Peace Treaty of Dorpat in 1920 concerning Finland and Estonia and the Peace Treaty of Riga in 1921 concerning Poland-Lithuania.

² Dieter BRANDES, *THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION IN EUROPE*, PART I: *The Role of the Churches, Historical wounds of Europe* in: *Teologia*, XX (2016) 4, pp. 44-68

³ See Robert CONQUEST, *The Nation Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities*, London 1970 and Alan W. FISHER, *The Crimean Tatars*, Stanford 1978.

All these genocides did not occur for the first time in the 20th century. All these genocides have a history of several hundred years of pogroms with persecution, torture, murder.

In the first part, this paper focuses on the History of Discrimination, Persecution and Pogroms against Jews in Europe from the Middle Ages to the modern times. The second part describes the unprecedented and brutal Genocide of the Jews in the 20th Century in Germany. The third part describes the reaction of the Churches in Germany and Europe.

But first, let me make the following ascertaining: The relationship between Christian churches and Jewish communities over centuries is particularly and unilaterally marked by great sufferings with discrimination, persecution and pogroms and genocides. Therefore „the way to reconciliation between Christians and Jews in Europe cannot be a normal dialogue about reconciliation” - not „after the holocaust and the centuries-long pogroms and persecutions”.⁴

II. Jewish and Christians from the 4th Century to the Central Middle Ages

The beginning indeed was promising because up to the Central Middle Ages Jews and Christians mostly lived together quite peacefully. But already in the Christian Roman Empire in 4th Century, there was a split in relationship with the Jews. Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo, accused the Jews of “*Occidistis Christum in parentibus uestris* - Through your parents you have killed Christ”. But nevertheless they are the “Old Testament people of God and bearer of the covenant with Yahve”, sons of Abraham “the father of faith”⁵. And with the principle that the Jews are historical witnesses to the history of Jesus and therefore can not be destroyed, he probably saved the lives of many Jews in the following centuries. Most Christians and Jews lived peacefully together up to the High Middle Ages. But with the onset of the Crusades, Jews increasingly became victims of Christian attacks.

⁴ See Dieter BRANDES, “Healing of Memories eine Aufgabe christlicher Kirchen im 20. Jahrhundert”, in: *epd-Dokumentation* Nr. 40 / 2005, Evangelischer Pressedienst, Frankfurt/M 2005, pp. 16-25, here p. 19.

⁵ Cornelius Petrus MAYER OSA, *Einführung in Augustins <Judenpredigt> (Aduersus Iudaeos)*, quoted from <https://www.augustinus.de/projekte-des-zaf/epistulae-projekt/11-startseite-nachrichten/2-beispiel-einer-nachricht>

II.1. From the Crusades time up to the Reformation

The call of Pope Urban II (1035-1099) for the first crusade on 27th November 1095 fuelled the fanaticism of the Crusaders who believed on imminent return of Messiah in the time of the Crusades. But this not only encouraged the idea of the need for a “salvation of the Holy Land” but also the ideology of “eliminating the unbelievers” - partly inclusive the Jews - along the way.

As a result, Jews also abalienated increasingly. And there arose a new religious movement in European Jewry, the “Chassidei Ashkenaz”, which understood the pogroms as the punishment of God for the removal of original Judaism. Moreover, their ascetic way of life, often without any contact with people of other faiths, promoted the distance of the Jews from public life. As a result, more and more Jews lived in their own neighborhoods and increasingly formed ghettos. Despite everything, Jews in many regions still could live widely peacefully with their neighbors. Although they had to live in poverty on the margins of society, they were tolerated within limits.

But after the pogroms in Bavaria in 1298/99, persecutions during the plague epidemic in 1348/49 and ritual murder allegations throughout Europe, the peaceful phases became rarer. More and more Jews had to flee to East Europe, where the situation did not escalate like in West and South West Europe.

As the plague advanced into Central Europe in 1348, the pogroms against Jewish escalated. Since one did not know the true causes - lice in the furs of rats - soon the Jews were accused as fountain poisoner and responsible for the “Black Death”. Although the Emperor and the Pope and the imperial estates exercised their role of protection regarding the Jews - that was an important source of income for them - too many local insurgents have had an interest in enriching themselves through Jewish properties. One year after the great plague pogroms of 1349, only very few Jews lived in Central Europe⁶.

⁶ Compare Daniel NIEMETZ, *Gebraucht und verfolgt - Juden im Mittelalter*, in: <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/weitere-epochen/mittelalter/juden-im-mittelalter-100.html>

But in the time of the Moorish period of Spain Judaism was largely tolerated in Spain, and brought together Jews, Christians and Arabs through the handcrafts and art and (Greek) philosophy into a time of prosperity. However, at the latest after the conquest of Granada in 1492 by Isabella I of Castile and her husband Ferdinand, a radical Catholicism began, and on the very same year the Spanish kingdom forced the exodus of Jews to neighboring countries⁷. In Toledo, a provision was passed that regarded Judaism as heresetics (“purity of blood”), which was racist. Spain became “free of Jews”.

II.2. Jewish and Christians in the Reformation period

In Germany Martin Luther wrote in the scripture even in 1523, “That Jesus Christ is a born Jew”⁸: “I hope that if one deals with the Jews in a friendly way and introduced them accurately in the Holy Bible, they will become much true Christians”⁹. But when this failed to succeed, the disappointed Luther gave expression to his disappointment and wrote hateful pamphlets against the Jews, like for example in 1543, “From the Jews and their Lies”¹⁰. In this document Luther wrote that the Jewish synagogues and schools must burn, as they are allegedly only “cursing, spitting and desecrating”¹¹ there as well as they experience “witchcraft”¹². And shortly before his death in 1546 Luther published “A warning against the Jews”¹³ and recommended not to have pity for them, but to destroy them.

But Protestant Christianity in Europe was not at all anti-Jewish everywhere. For instance, the Protestant Netherlands accepted the Jews on the background of a decree that no one should be persecuted on the basis of religious conviction.

⁷ See, for instance, *Die Araber in Spanien*, in: <https://www.wasistwas.de/archiv-geschichte-details/die-araber-in-spanien.html>

⁸ Martin LUTHER, *Daß Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei* (1523) WA 11, pp. 307–336.

⁹ Martin LUTHER, *Daß Jesus Christus ein geborener Jude sei*, p. 315, Z. 25–28.

¹⁰ Martin LUTHER, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen* (1543) WA 53, pp. 412–552.

¹¹ Martin LUTHER, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, p. 523, row 10.

¹² Martin LUTHER, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, p. 523, row 23.

¹³ Martin LUTHER, *Eine Vermahnung wider die Juden* (1546) WA 51, pp. 195–196.

II.3. Jews in Europe in the modern era¹⁴

Jewish history in the modern era ranges from the beginning of the Haskala (Jewish Enlightenment)¹⁵ from around 1770 to 1948 up to the founding of the state Israel. After the Reformation and especially the Enlightenment, some Western European countries had become more tolerant towards the Jews.

During the Commonwealth of England in the mid-1650s (Oliver Cromwell), the Jews in England after two centuries first again were allowed to practise their faith openly. In 1664 it led to an official charter on the protection of Jews in England¹⁶. In the following time of the Enlightenment, some Western European countries had become more tolerant towards the Jews.

In the Habsburg monarchy, Emperor Joseph II with the (second) Toleration Patent of January 2, 1782 announced that the 1.5 million Jews living traditionally in ghettos got greater freedom in practicing their religion. In the European March Revolution of 1848, many Jewish academics were committed in the fight for liberalism.

In Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm III expanded the rights of naturalized Jews in 1812 through the “Jewish Edict of Prussia”.

In the 18th Century, ideas of natural law and human rights of tolerance towards Jews were contributed as well. After the French Revolution of 1789, the Jews in Europe gradually received near the same rights as other citizens. With the Enlightenment in Europe and the Jews Haskalah Movement among the Jews, a lot of Christian-Jewish relations developed in a positive way among important German scholars.

¹⁴ To the following compare Kurt SCHUBERT, *Jüdische Geschichte*, 7. edition, München, 2012, pp. 31-32.

¹⁵ On the Jewish side arose the movement of the Haskala - rationality, intellect, but also “enlighten with the help of the intellect” - , which is generally referred to as a “Jewish Enlightenment”. It originated in Berlin and Königsberg in the 1770s and 1780s and spread from there to Eastern Europe. It originated in the Jewish bourgeoisie of Berlin, which was inspired by the French Enlightenment and advocated tolerance and an equal position for Jews in European societies. (compare Michael GRAETZ, “JÜDISCHE AUFKLÄRUNG”, in: Mordechai BREUER, Michael GRAETZ, *Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte in der Neuzeit*, volume 1: *Tradition und Aufklärung 1600–1780*, München 2000, p. 251).

¹⁶ See Todd M. ENDELMAN, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000*, Berkeley 2002, pp. 26-27; 29

The phase of the Haskalah came to its end with the rise of Jewish Zionism - internationally known through the book published by Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) "Der Judenstaat"¹⁷ ("The Jewish State") - first in Russia around 1881. However, many Jewish scholars continued seeking dialogue with Christianity at the beginning of the 20th Century, the most well-known among them being Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Leo Baeck. In the Nazi era, this was put to an abrupt end. The outbreak of anti-Semitic persecution left a deep divide between the religions.

On the other hand, the situation of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe had deteriorated rapidly since the middle of the 19th Century. Despite the 2000-year-old history of the Jews in Russia, the years from 1881 onwards marked a special culmination in their persecution. Pogroms and restrictive administrative pressure were followed by mass emigration of millions of people.

Between 1890 and the end of World War I, about two million of the more than five million Jews living in the Russian Empire emigrated to the United States. The pogroms were flaring up again and again until the Russian Revolution of 1917. But even after the Russian Revolution, the pogroms were not over. The historian Orlando Figes studied another 1200 pogroms with 150.000 dead in the period between 1919 and 1920¹⁸.

From 1948 to the 1970s, more than 1.1 million Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews¹⁹ emigrated from Arab and Islamic countries after flight and expulsion (see above).

II.4. History of the Jews in Germany from 1917 to 1945

a) *The Weimar Period*

Even in the time of the Weimar period, the anti-Semites amounted to a new and unprecedented number. When the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics and Eugenics was founded in Berlin-Dahlem in 1927, the Kaiser Wilhelm Society appointed anthropologist Eugen Fischer as its director. Together with the botanist Erwin Baur,

¹⁷ Theodor HERZL, *Der Judenstaat*, Leipzig Wien, 1896.

¹⁸ Orlando FIGES, *A People's Tragedy – The Russian Revolution 1891–1924*, New York, 1997, p. 679.

¹⁹ Compare Warren HOGE, "Group seeks justice for «forgotton Jews»" in: *The New York Times*, 5th November 2007.

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director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Breeding Research, and his student Fritz Lenz, Fischer published the two-volume fundamental work “Human heritability and racial hygiene”²⁰. In the section written by Fischer one could read about “the special position of the Jews”, namely that they “completely fall out of the range of Europeans”.

On the other hand, “the Nordic man” transcends all other races in “wilfulness and providential foresight”, he marches “with regard to spiritual endowment at the head of humanity”²¹.

“As Jews, we are faced with the fact that a hostile power has taken over the government in Germany”, reads the editorial of the “Jüdischen Rundschau” on the day after the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor (January 30, 1933).

b) The Holocaust against the Jews – the Shoah

The almost total extermination of Jews in Europe has been described by the Greek adjective Holocaust (ὀλόκαυστος: “completely burnt”) since the end of the Second World War. The word originally meant the “completely burned animal sacrifice”. The Jews themselves have referred to the genocide of European Jews with the Hebrew term Shoah (שׁוֹאָה: “great catastrophe”) since 1948. The term Shoah is meant to express that the hundreds of pogroms against Jews in the last two millennia were followed by the GREATEST catastrophe in the 20th Century.

Instead of the term Shoah Jewish theologians also use the designation Third Churban (destruction, catastrophe, annihilation) with reference to the first and second destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem (586 BC by the Babylonians and 70 AD by the Romans) as a catastrophe, which concerns all Jews²².

In the increasingly aggressive anti-Jewish policy in the German so called “Third Reich”, the November pogrom of 1938, the Crystal Night on November 9, marks the decisive turning point before the beginning

²⁰ Erwin BAUR, Eugen FISCHER and Fritz LENZ, *Grundriss der menschlichen Erblchkeit- lehre und Rassenhygiene*, München, 1921.

²¹ *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933-1945, Vol. 1: Deutsches Reich 1933-1937*, edited by Institut des Bundesarchivs für Zeitgeschichte, p. 24.

²² Compare for the name of the Genocide for instance James E. YOUNG, “Die Namen des Holocaust”, in: James E. YOUNG, *Beschreiben des Holocaust. Darstellung und Folgen der Interpretation*, Frankfurt am Main, 1992, pp. 139–163.

of the deportations²³. The so-called “Aryanization” and the more radical expulsion policy against the Jewish population were going hand in hand with the Nazi armaments plan and the expansion of the German Third Reich.

In the twenty months between January 1938 and August 31, 1939, Germany annexed Austria in March and the Sudetenland in October. In March 1939, Lithuania “handed over” Memel Territory to the Nazi government. A week earlier, the German Army (“Wehrmacht”) invaded Prague, and on 1st September Poland was invaded as well.

From 1941 to 1945, the deportations and murders were systematically carried out, from 1942 onwards also by “industrial methods”. In his “Reichstag speech” of January 30, 1939, Hitler blamed “international financial Jewry” for a possible new world war, adding that the result would be “the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.” In newspapers of that time, such concepts appeared increasingly as the “final solution to the Jewish problem”. Ever since the November pogrom, there was a danger to the lives of Jews in Germany. In 1938, the number of refugees rose dramatically: about 40,000 Jews emigrated from the “Old Reich” and about 60,000 from Austria. However, they were nowhere welcomed with open arms²⁴.

While German cities were already bombed by the British and there were serious civilian victims, Minister of Propaganda Goebbels had nothing more important to do than to appeal for the “solution to the Jewish problem”, which took place in stages - initially, ghettos were built, in which the robbed and disenfranchised Jews were crammed together – e.g. in the Lodz Ghetto (renamed Litzmannstadt) in April 1940 and in the Warsaw Ghetto in October 1940; more ghettos being founded by 1941²⁵.

During the Third Reich about 42,500 camps were built²⁶, including 980 concentration camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka or Majdanek, as well as 30,000 medicine experiment camps and 1,150 Jewish ghettos, including the largest ghetto in Warsaw with 450,000 Jews.

²³ Compare <https://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/sendungen/hoerspiel-und-medienkunst/hoerspiel-pool/hoerspiel-hoeredition-die-quellen-sprechen-2-deutsches-reich100.html>

²⁴ <https://www.br.de/radio/bayern2/sendungen/hoerspiel-und-medienkunst/hoerspiel-pool/hoerspiel-hoeredition-die-quellen-sprechen-2-deutsches-reich100.html>

²⁵ See: *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden ...*, p. 24.

²⁶ See: *Tagesspiegel* Berlin 3. März 2013 US-Forscher: 42 500 Lager in der Nazizeit.

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At the Wannsee Conference on January 20, 1942, 15 high-ranking representatives of the National Socialist Reich government and SS authorities came together in a villa on the Greater Wannsee in Berlin to organize the Holocaust of the Jews started in detail and to coordinate the cooperation of the involved authorities. The meeting was chaired by SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, president of the Interpol and thus host at the IKPK-Wannseevilla.²⁷

In the National Socialist genocide about 6 million European Jews were murdered (the numbers are stated between 5.6 to 6.3 million), including about 1.5 million children. Most Jews were murdered in Poland: 2.7 million. 2.1 million were murdered in the Soviet Union²⁸, 565,000 Jews in Hungary and 300,000 Jews in Romania (most of whom were deported to Auschwitz by the German Wehrmacht).

499,682 citizens of Jewish faith lived in the German Reich itself in 1933 (according to the census of 16 June). The number of murdered Jews in the German Reich is stated 160.000. Approximately 340,000 Jews fled abroad or were cast out.²⁹

II.5. The process of dealing with the Holocaust in Germany

a) The legal process of dealing with the Holocaust

a.1.) The punishment of the culprits in Germany by the Allies

After 1945, about 15,000 Jews were living in the Federal Republic of Germany, which was founded in 1948. They began rebuilding the Jewish communities. In the German Democratic Republic, their number was decreasing until the construction of the Wall in 1961 to about 1500. In 1989, about 29,000 Jews were living in the FRG, and about 400 Jews in the GDR. After the “political turnaround”, about 230,000 Jews migrated from the successor states of the Soviet Union to Germany from 1991 to 2015³⁰.

²⁷ Compare to Holocaust casualty figures Wolfgang BENZ (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, München 1996

²⁸ In 1941, the largest of all Holocaust massacres in the Second World War was carried out in the “Canyon of Babi Yar” in Kiev with more than 51.000 victims shot under the responsibility of the German Army. Compare Hartmut RÜSS, “KIEV/BABI YAR”, in: Gerd R. UEBERSCHAER (ed.) *Orte des Grauens. Verbrechen im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Darmstadt, 2003, p. 102.

²⁹ Compare to Holocaust casualty figures Wolfgang BENZ (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords...*

³⁰ *Bericht des Unabhängigen Expertenkreises Antisemitismus*, Bundestag Drucksache 18/11970, 07. April 2017

However, since more than half of these emigrated again, around 117,000 Jews were still living in Germany in 2015, of which around 100,000 are registered members of Jewish communities³¹.

The judiciary processing of the Nazi period began in West Germany not immediately after the end of the war, but only in the 1960s. The fact that the punishment of those responsible in Nazi Germany took place immediately in 1945 by the Allies had three main reasons: firstly, a “collective guilt” should not be attributed to Nazi Germany, but the individuals had to be punished; secondly, a “fairer trial” had to show how a democracy works; thirdly, “the German people were to be mercilessly shown the full extent of Hitler’s delusion and its consequences”³².

In the London Agreement of August 8, 1945, the Allies decided that in Nuremberg, “the city in which Hitler had staged his Nazi party rallies, the ugly side of National Socialism had to be shown”³³. The trial ended with eleven death sentences that were carried out on October 15, 1946 Bormann (in absentia), Göring (suicide shortly before), von Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, Frick, Keitel, Jodl, Kaltenbrunner, Frank, Streicher, Sauckel and Seyß -Inquart³⁴.

a.2.) The legal process of dealing with the Holocaust in Germany itself

Nevertheless, the crimes of the Holocaust **in Germany itself** were legally dealt with to a larger extent for the **first time only two decades after the end of the war**. It was only 18 years after the end of the Second World War that the legal process of dealing with the Holocaust began in a Frankfurt jury court with the “Auschwitz Trial”. For the first time, 22 Holocaust-criminals had to answer to a German court against considerable resistance in politics.

The judgments were largely mild³⁵. Whole professional groups of accomplices such as lawyers and doctors were not even charged.

³¹ Compare to the numbers of Jews in Germany after 1945 Kurt SCHUBERT, *Jüdische Geschichte*, pp. 31-32.

³² Compare *Der Nürnberger Prozess in Planet Wissen* : https://www.planet-wissen.de/geschichte/deutsche_geschichte/nachkriegszeit/pwiedernuernbergerprozess100.html.

³³ *Der Nürnberger Prozess in Planet Wissen* : https://www.planet-wissen.de/geschichte/deutsche_geschichte/nachkriegszeit/pwiedernuernbergerprozess100.html.

³⁴ See: *Der Nürnberger Prozess in Planet Wissen* : https://www.planet-wissen.de/geschichte/deutsche_geschichte/nachkriegszeit/pwiedernuernbergerprozess100.html.

³⁵ See *Der Auschwitz-Prozess in Planet Wissen* : <https://www.planet-wissen.de/geschichte/nationalsozialismus/auschwitz/pwiewissensfrage160.html>.

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The last major Holocaust proceedings were the Majdanek trials from 1975 to 1981 in Düsseldorf³⁶. Of the original 15 accused persons only eight were sentenced, one received a life sentence.

The relatively mild verdicts were followed by worldwide protests³⁷.

b) The process of dealing with the Holocaust within the churches in Germany

*b.1.) The Protestant Churches*³⁸

In the church elections of 1933, “Deutsche Christen”³⁹ were elected to the church leadership in most German Protestant churches. It is not surprising, therefore, that the German Protestant churches “did not take up any [noteworthy] opposition to the Anti-Semitism propagated by the National Socialist movement”⁴⁰. Over the past few centuries, latent anti-Semitism has repeatedly come to the fore especially among Lutheran theologians, referring to the older Martin Luther⁴¹. The “vulnerability of many church-dedicated people” to Anti-Semitism and racism was due to the “centuries of Anti-Jewish tradition of the Church”⁴².

The initial statements of the EKD after the end of the war, such as the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt⁴³ in October 1945 and the Darmstädter

³⁶ Compare more by Martin ROOS, Helen QUAND, ...*und hinter den Gesichtern. Biografische Notizen zu Beteiligten am Majdanek-Prozess (1975–1981)*; editor Mahn- und Gedenkstätte, Düsseldorf, 1996.

³⁷ In Poland itself, six defendants had been sentenced to death after the invasion of Soviet troops in a trial from November 27 to December 2, 1944. In a second trial in 1946-1948, seven other defendants were sentenced to death in Lubli and a further 88 received prison sentences of between 3 and 15 years.

³⁸ The „Evangelical Church in Germany”.

³⁹ The German Christians (“Deutsche Christen” DC) were a church group very close to the National Socialist idea

⁴⁰ Siegfried HERMIE, “Die Evangelische Kirche und das Judentum nach 1945”, in: Werner BERGMANN and Rainer ERB (eds.), *Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur nach 1945*, Opladen, 1990, pp. 197 ff, here p. 197

⁴¹ Some theologians “even saw the curse of God on Israel and thought that it had proof of this in the diaspora existence of this people”, Siegfried HERMIE, “Die Evangelische Kirche und das Judentum nach 1945”, p. 197.

⁴² Siegfried HERMIE, “Die Evangelische Kirche und das Judentum nach 1945”, p. 197.

⁴³ “Through us, infinite suffering has been brought upon many peoples and countries” (“Die Stuttgarter Erklärung”, in: *Verordnungs- und Nachrichtenblatt der EKD*, Nr. 1, Januar 1946).

Wort (1947)⁴⁴ did not mention the Holocaust, but spoke of a complicity of Christians in the World War and the crimes of National Socialism.

In a “statement on the Jewish problem” of the “Reichsbruderrat” council of the “Confessing Church” in April 1948⁴⁵ in Darmstadt it was admitted that “We are saddened by what happened in the past and by the fact that we did not release a common statement against it”. and that “We have offered our hand to Christians on all the injustice and suffering that happened to Israel among us”. Nevertheless, a direct common guilt was not admitted.

At the Constituent Church Assembly of the “Evangelical Church in Germany” (EKD) in November 1948 it was then requested to insert the following sentence in the basic national order: “The EKD knows about their guilt and their missionary responsibility towards the people of Israel”. The request was withdrawn for theological and constitutional reasons, the problem of the mission concerning the Jews was ceded for further deliberations.

First the synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany from April 23 to April 27, 1950 in Berlin-Weissensee went well beyond the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt and the “Darmstädter Wort” and, according to a draft by Heinrich Vogel⁴⁶, adopted a statement on “blaming Israel”⁴⁷. In this statement it was explicitly made known: “We state that through neglect and silence before the God of mercy we have become complicity in the injustice committed by the people against the Jews”⁴⁸. For the first time it

⁴⁴ “The Church’s alliance with conservative powers has yielded terrible consequences”, in: “Darmstädter Wort des Bruderrates der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland - Zum politischen Weg unseres Volkes vom 8. August 1947” in: *Kirchliches Jahrbuch 1945-1948*, Gütersloh, 1950, pp. 220 ff.

⁴⁵ Hartmut LUDWIG, “Darmstädter Wort”, in: *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4. Edition, volume 2 Tübingen, 1999, column 581f.

⁴⁶ Heinrich Vogel was a composer and songwriter of chamber music and hymns and professor of Systematic Theology at Humboldt University in East Berlin. He co-founded the Christian Peace Conference (CPC), an international peace organization whose members were churches; church congregations and individuals mainly from the Eastern Bloc states.(compare *Festschrift für Heinrich Vogel*, Berlin/Stuttgart, edited by Kurt SCHARF, Berlin 1962.

⁴⁷ *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1950*, Gütersloh, 1951, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁸ The version originally submitted by Henry “We profess the Germans’, guilt in the mass murder of the Jews ...” However, the Synod was significantly toned down.

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was also stated: “We believe that God’s promise to the chosen people of Israel remained in force even after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ”, and, moreover, “We ask all Christians to renounce anti-Semitism and to resist it with earnestness where it is stirred up again, and meet the Jews and Jewish Christians in a fraternal spirit”⁴⁹.

In the 1960s, a long intense discussion began on the up to then controversial topic of the Jewish mission. This was especially addressed in the 1980 Rhinland Synod Declaration “Synodical Resolution on the Renewal of Relations between Christians and Jews”: “We believe in the lasting election of the Jewish people as God’s people and recognize that the Church has been taken into the covenant of God with His people through Jesus Christ” (thesis IV) and it was once again affirmed: “We affirm the responsibility and guilt of the Christianity in Germany for the Holocaust” (see theses 1)⁵⁰.

Numerous other regional synods followed these confessions.

b.2.) The Catholic Church

The behaviour of Pope Pius XII against the crime of the Holocaust has been controversial to the present day within and outside of the Catholic Church. On the one hand he fought for the salvation of the Roman Jews, on the other hand, however, he was silent concerning the Holocaust, although he had known about the proceedings, as Rolf Hochhuth had also researched for his play⁵¹.

A critical review of the Catholic guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust began only in 1958 after Pius’ death. For the first time in history, his successor Pope John XXIII spoke about the Jews as “brothers”.

A prayer of penitence of John XXIII, which he formulated shortly before his death in 1963 reads:

“We recognize today that many centuries of blindness covered our eyes, so that we do not see anymore the beauty of Your Chosen People and we do not recognize in their faces the features of our Firstborn Brother.

⁴⁹ *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 1950*, Gütersloh, 1951, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁰ *Landessynode der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland Protocol* from 12. Januar 1980.

⁵¹ ROLF HOCHHUTH, *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel*, Reinbek, 1963.

We recognize that Kain's sign is on our forehead. In the course of the centuries our brother Abel was slain in the blood that we shed, and he shed tears which we have caused, as we forgot Your love. Forgive us the curse which we wrongfully affixed to the name of the Jews. Forgive us, that for the second time, we nailed You to the cross.

Because we did not know what we had done...⁵²

Through its statement, "Nostra Aetate"⁵³, on the relationship to non-Christian religions, the Second Vatican Council, convoked by Pope John XXIII on October 28 in 1965, condemned - also for the first time - the "Deicide Theory" (see above) and declared the fight against anti-Semitism to be a Christian duty.

The council condemned "all the hatred, persecution and manifestations of anti-Semitism" that took place for religious reasons. In order to comply with these Council decisions and the new situation, a new Codex Juris Canonici was drafted, which came into force on 25 January 1983. All anti-Jewish tendencies were discarded in it.

The Joint Synod of the German Dioceses declared on November 22, 1975:⁵⁴

"And in the time of National Socialism, despite the exemplary behavior of individuals and groups, on the whole we were a church community that lived too much with their backs turned to the fate of this persecuted Jewish people, whose eyes were fixated too much on the threat to its own Institutions and was silent regarding the crimes committed against Jews and Judaism. [...] The practical righteousness of our desire for renewal also depends on the confession of guilt and the readiness to painfully learn from this guilt-story of our country and also of our church."

⁵² "Wir erkennen..." in Galil.com: Jüdisches Leben online : www.hagalil.com/nizza/johannes-23.htm, called on 13th October 2018

⁵³ Compare Hans Hermann HENRICH (ed.), "Nostra Aetate – Ein zukunftsweisender Konzilstext. Die Haltung der Kirche zum Judentum 40 Jahre danach" in: *Aachener Beiträge zu Pastoral- und Bildungsfragen* 23, Aachen, 2006, pp. 233-237

⁵⁴ Alexander GROSS, *Gehorsame Kirche - ungehorsame Christen im Nationalsozialismus*, 2. edition, Mainz, 2000, pp. 80-81.

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On March 16, 1998, the Vatican Commission on Religious Relations with Judaism published the declaration *Unspeakable Tragedy*. This named errors and the blame of individual Catholics in question form, without concrete examples, however, not as a failure of the church as a whole. The Nuremberg Race Laws, the November Pogrom of 1938, and the deportations of the Jews remained unnamed, as was the church's silence at the time. The Shoah was portrayed as a "typical work of a new heathen regime". The following sentence received high criticism, among others from the Central Committee of German Catholics:

"His anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity, and he did not hesitate to oppose the church and persecute its members in the pursuit of its goals"⁵⁵.

On March 12, 2000, Pope John Paul II asked God for forgiveness for the hatred against the Jews:

"God of our fathers, you have chosen Abraham and his descendants to bear your name to the peoples. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of all who have made your sons and daughters suffer throughout history. We apologize and seek to promote genuine brotherhood with the people of the covenant"⁵⁶.

In 2013, the Austrian Bishops' Conference issued a statement called "75 years after the November Pogrom of 1938", in which it confessed that the church "had failed in its theology at the time ... [and] ... in love" and was jointly responsible for a climate in which anti-Semitism could thrive⁵⁷.

III. The European Churches and the World Council of Churches (WCC): the process of dealing with the Shoah

On the European level, the "deep connection between Judaism and Christianity" is addressed in many ecumenical documents, such as the

⁵⁵ Alexander GROSS, *Gehorsame Kirche...*, pp. 80-81.

⁵⁶ <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/dokumentation-das-schuldbekenntnis-im-wortlaut-a-68778.html>

⁵⁷ *Amtsblatt der Österreichischen Bischofskonferenz* Nr. 61, 5. Februar 2014, edited by Peter SCHIPKA and Walter LUKASE on behalf of the Generalsekretariat der Österreichischen Bischofskonferenz, Wien 2014, p. 4.

document of the Leuenberg Church Fellowship “Church and Israel”: “For the Christian proclamation, the testimony of the Holy Scriptures of Israel is a constitutive part of the history of its own revelation ... the revelation (of the Old Testament) testified in the Holy Scriptures of Israel ... (is) permanently addressed to Israel”⁵⁸.

The Charta Oecumenica of April 22, 2001⁵⁹ as a joint document of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Episcopal Conferences (Consilium Conferentiarum Episcoporum Europae, CCEE) emphasizes the “insoluble bond with Israel”:

„We are bound up in a unique community with the people Israel, the people of the Covenant which God has never terminated. Our faith teaches us that our Jewish sisters and brothers «are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable» (Rom 11, 28-29)”⁶⁰.

And furthermore:

“We deplore and condemn all manifestations of anti-Semitism, all outbreaks of hatred and persecutions. We ask God for forgiveness for anti-Jewish attitudes among Christians, and we ask our Jewish sisters and brothers for reconciliation. ... We commit ourselves to oppose all forms of anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism in the church and in society, to seek and intensify dialogue with our Jewish sisters and brothers at all levels.”

The extermination campaigns of the National Socialists against the Jews and the experiences with the Nazi regime led shortly after the end of the Second World War to churches in Europe confessing their own responsibility for the persecutions of the Jews and to their obligation to

⁵⁸ “Kirche und Israel - Ein Beitrag der reformatorischen Kirchen Europas zum Verhältnis von Christen und Juden”, *Leuenberger Kirchengemeinschaft* 2001, 2. *Israel und die Kirche in der christlichen Lehre*, Section 2.2.10. http://www.jcrelations.net/Kirche_und_Israel_-_Ein_Beitrag_der_reformatorischen_Kirchen_Europas_zum_Verh__1.2417.0.html?L=2

⁵⁹ *Charta Oecumenica*. http://www.ekumenia.fi/opillinen_vuorovaikutus/asiakirjoja_-_documents/charta_oecumenica/charta_oecumenica_in_english/

⁶⁰ 10. *Strengthening community with Judaism*.

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discard and process the Christian-Jewish hostility in all their fields of activity.

Thus, from July 30 to August 5, 1947, an international group of Christians (23 Protestants and 9 Catholics) as well as 28 Jews gathered in an “Emergency conference on anti-Semitism” in Seelisberg, Switzerland led by the *National Council of Christians and Jews* (USA) and the *British Council of Christians and Jews*. They adopted a 10-point manifesto on a new relationship between Jews and Christians without anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism.

The following 5 theses are part of this manifesto:

- “1. Remember that One God speaks to us all through the Old and the New Testaments.
2. Remember that Jesus was born of a Jewish mother of the seed of David and the people of Israel, and that His everlasting love and forgiveness embraces His own people and the whole world.
5. Avoid distorting or misrepresenting biblical or post-biblical Judaism with the object of extolling Christianity.
9. Avoid promoting the superstitious notion that the Jewish people are reprobate, accursed, reserved for a destiny of suffering.
10. Avoid speaking of the Jews as if the first members of the Church had not been Jews”⁶¹.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) dealt with the “Christian conduct towards the Jews” in its first General Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, in the Fourth Section, highlighting the special significance of the Jewish people for the Christian faith, as well as the strengthening of the fight against anti-Semitism as part of the Christian testimony.

The WCC’s Third General Assembly in New Delhi in 1961 added to the Christian testimony against anti-Semitism of 1948 the following: “In Christian education, the historical facts that led to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ should not be portrayed as imposing responsibility on the Jewish people of today”.

⁶¹ *Der Grundstein jüdisch-christlicher Begegnung ist gelegt - 60 Jahre Seelisberger Thesen*, editor : Schweizer Bischofskonferenz (SBK), Schweizerischer Evangelischer Kirchenbund (SEK), Schweizerischer Israelitischer Gemeindebund (SIG), Bern - Fribourg • Zürich, 2007 pp. 54-56.

The WCC Commission on Faith and Order received a report in Bristol on “The Church and the Jewish People”⁶² in 1967, which called for a comprehensive reflection on what the continued existence of Jewry meant for the Christian faith, and how Christians should testify their faith towards the Jews⁶³.

⁶² R. RENDTORFF, H. HENRIX, *Die Kirchen und das Judentum, Dokumente von 1945 bis 1985*, Paderborn, 1989, 2nd edition, pp. 350 – 363

⁶³ Compare *Ökumenische Rundschau*, 2008, 57. Jg. Heft 4, pp. 413-414.