



## Everyday anti-Semitism

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*Ambiguous jokes about Jews, anti-Semitic stereotypes, racial clichés and mockery - all that still belongs to everyday life in Germany - often in unenlightened as well as bizarre mixtures. Is it really impossible to learn from history?*

Extremely embarrassing and difficult to downplay as stupid boy pranks: In August 2013 Bishop Friedhelm Hofmann (Würzburg) and Archbishop Ludwig Schick (Bamberg) have (must) dismissed two seminarians. In the bierkeller of the Würzburg seminary they had shared concentration camp jokes and then imitated Hitler. It is little consolation that the investigating judge of the Higher Regional Court adjudged that "there is no brown network and no brown marsh in the seminary" - negative headlines were guaranteed. What is not prohibited legally may morally be problematic - especially in Germany and Austria. After the years of horror from 1933 to 1945 both nations bear a special responsibility.

Just as a reminder: On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the pogroms of November 1938, with their common word (1988) "Accepting the Burden of History" the German and Austrian bishops pointed to a euphemism which was masterminded by the Nazi ideology, and they distanced themselves from the vocabulary. "Soon the trivializing word 'Kristallnacht' circulated. But everybody knew that in reality the November pogroms had been street tenor of the vilest dimensions, ordered from above, but organized on the spot." Christians had their share in everyday anti-Semitism - and especially for them it is more forbidden than for any other religion, because Christianity is rooted in Judaism. Or to quote Friedrich Heer, "the Jews are God's first love.

Since Pius XI, the popes have emphasized the close relationship of the Church with Judaism. In September 1938 Pius XI said that we all, as descendants of Abraham, are spiritually Semites. Whether Hochhuth is right or not - Pius XII has made sure that Jews were accommodated in Roman monasteries. As Apostolic Delegate in Turkey, the future Pope John XXIII has protected Jews from deportation. Paul VI was the first pope ever who (in January 1964) visited the Holy Land. John Paul II was the first pope who went into a synagogue. As perhaps no pope before him, Benedict XVI theologically was close to Judaism.

When just before the federal election German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited the former concentration camp in Dachau, she was criticized by various quarters. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* of 22 August 2013 it said, "The Germans can be strict when it is about the proper commemoration. The Chancellor is criticized for the date when she went to the former concentration camp.

Her seven predecessors, on the other hand, have never been criticized for the date when all of them did not go to Dachau." Merkel attended the camp between two campaign appearances in Erlangen and Dachau - at the invitation of the 93-year-old Holocaust survivor Max Mannheimer.

Merkel's words afterwards have become less known than the criticism of the "sandwich visit." The journalist Nico Fried wondered how the Chancellor would cope with the balancing act between the visit in the concentration camp and in the beer tent. "A greater contrast," Merkel

said, "is hardly possible. A few minutes ago I was still in the Dachau memorial, a stone's throw from here," and now on a "festival of happiness and life", which was also attended by Charlotte Knobloch, the long-standing president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Merkel also directly touched on the contrast. "Even at that time the concentration camp was in our midst. Those who wanted were also then able to see and hear it." Why does this today, 68 years after the war, still not yet work?

75 years ago in Germany, and one day later in Austria synagogues were burning. Jewish shops, schools and homes were looted and demolished. Germans and Austrians of Jewish faith were suddenly only "Jews" who were spat on and kicked, beaten and harassed, tortured and killed - without prohibition. They were at the mercy of an incited mob. The history books know the night from 9 to 10 November 1938 under the heading of Kristallnacht.

Five years ago, on May 10, 1933, at the Berlin Opera Square (now Bebelplatz) and in other German cities at night theatrically staged public book burnings had taken place. The works of proscribed (not only Jewish) writers - among them Heinrich Heine, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Döblin, Erich Kästner, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Erich Maria Remarque, Arthur Schnitzler, Kurt Tucholsky, Franz Werfel, Carl Zuckmayer or Nelly Sachs, to name a few - were thereby thrown into the fire. "We have turned our actions against the Un-German Spirit. I surrender everything un-German to the fire," was the cynical slogan of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. What was previously a part of the canon of German culture was suddenly regarded as "trash".

Burned books, burned men: A nation that has generated Goethe and Schiller will never get rid of this shame - no expiration date, no statute of limitations. "The memory of the days of 1938 is no misspent nostalgia. Because today we must ask ourselves whether the word, the word of God is burned again," said the retired Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Franz König (1905-2004) in Vienna in the church of St Ruprecht on 9 November 1999, on the occasion of the commemorative week "Mechaye Hametim - Revival of the Dead." Even today there are "incendiaries". Parodistic belittlement must therefore not be trivialized. (Everyday) anti-Semitism, either at the pub or anywhere else, must not be regarded as "good form" - and this applies first of all to Christians.

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