



## Anti-Semitism, the Shoah and the Church. A study of a German-Catholic Working Group (1996)

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## **Introduction**

1. The Hebrew word "Shoah" means catastrophe, disaster, annihilation. Today it is used to describe the persecution and murder of the European Jews under National Socialism. It cost the lives of six million Jews including over a million children. Most of them were killed in extermination camps such as Bergen-Belsen, Maidanek and Treblinka. Above all Auschwitz became the site of mass murder.

The cruelty which occurred during the persecution and murder of the Jews exceeds anything one can possibly imagine and comprehend. The Shoah was unique. Women and men, old people, and children and infants were humiliated, abused, tortured and deprived of their human dignity in a way which was unknown up to that time. Those who survived the agonies of the transport and the camps met a horrible end in the gas chambers. Only a very small number survived - horribly marked for life. All this occurred for just one reason - because they were Jews. Their very existence was considered a crime by the murderers. The Jews were to disappear from the earth. The intended totality of the annihilation has a decidedly diabolical dimension.

2. The unprecedented crime raises many questions. Historians, sociologists, political scientists and psychologists are investigating how it could have happened and how it proceeded in detail. At the present time an end to the scholarly efforts to establish the facts and interpret the event is not yet in sight. In the end such an occurrence cannot be fit into the course of history when one applies the usual standards of historical research. First of all and most profoundly it calls for a moral remembrance which listens to and subjects itself to the voice of the victims.

The remembrance of the Shoah corresponds to the biblical mandate: "Bear in mind!" (cf. Dt 25:17 among others). It commemorates the victims and admonishes the living. The memory of the Shoah must not be blotted out. It exposes failure and leads to repentance. It arouses one's willingness to accept responsibility, and it can become a source of action.

Strengthened by the memory, Christians must ask themselves about the Church's co-responsibility and guilt for the centuries-old hostility towards the Jews which eventually led to the Shoah. This is particularly true for the Christians in Germany where the millionfold killing was planned and set in motion.

With the following reflections we want to confront the challenges of the Shoah for the entire Church. They call to mind stages and situations in history; they face the question of how far the *whole* Church has a share of the responsibility for the Shoah and is therefore guilty; finally, they describe the tasks of the Church after the Shoah.

## **I. The Path to the Shoah and the History of the Church<sup>1</sup>**

3. Whoever searches for the historical conditions for and causes of the Shoah discovers political movements and ideological positions, psychological predispositions, social problems and fundamental ethical decisions which were also operative outside the Church. From the earliest period of Christianity up to the age of the Enlightenment, however, Anti-Semitism was primarily supported by Church doctrines and Christian piety. The Church must therefore ask herself how this religiously based Anti-Semitism came about. She must reflect upon Anti-Semitic phases and situations in her history and recall where she stood when the Jews were forced to tread the path into the Shoah.

### **A. Causes of the Hostility**

4. The Church grew out of and is indissolubly linked to Judaism. According to the words of the apostle Paul, Jews and Christians can look upon themselves as different branches, which have grown on the same olive tree (Rom 11:13-24). The common foundations did not prevent the occurrence of fierce disputes between Jews and Christians during the very early stages of the Church.

At first the conflict between Jews and the followers of Jesus was an intra-Jewish controversy. It was sparked off by the questions of how the Torah should be interpreted, whether Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah announced by the Prophets, whether the Last Days had begun with his

resurrection, and whether faith in Jesus justified humans before God. The Jewish followers of Jesus were convinced of these things and hoped for salvation from faith in him. The Jewish majority did not share this faith since it was not able to discern that the biblical promises of a safe and just world would have been fulfilled with Jesus. When Jesus' disciples proclaimed the Gospel not only to Jews, but also to non-Jews ("pagans") after his death and resurrection, the initially intra-Jewish conflict became one between Jews and Christians from the peoples, between synagogue and Church.

5. The New Testament Scriptures were composed during this time of conflict. In many passages they reflect the fierceness of the debate at that time in which fundamental questions were at stake for both sides. As a result polemical statements found their way into the New Testament. Some can be explained from the disappointment of Jesus' followers that so many Jews did not embrace the faith in Jesus. Initially they were probably also reactions to harassment and aggression on the part of the Jews. Of much further-reaching and more tragic consequence was the tendency of New Testament authors to hold the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus whereas the complicity of the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate in the condemnation of Jesus diminished in importance in the later Gospels. The guilt of the Jews was established with the biblical passage: "And the whole people said in reply, 'His blood be upon us and upon our children'" (Mt 27:25). This response provided the grounds for separation and hostility. In connection with the other differences, it was the reason for a Christian anti-Judaism, which lasted for centuries. In the late second century the theologically untenable accusation of Melito of Sardis appeared that the Jews were Godkillers. The charge has been repeated in theology and preaching and in catechesis and traditions up to the present time. It has caused immeasurable damage. It has been used to justify numerous persecutions of the Jews.

6. Christians also made other accusations against the Jews, which feigned biblical legitimation without their being biblically sound at all. Thus they called the Jews "hardened" because they did not believe the gospel of Jesus and persisted in this hardness of heart. Even the Old Testament, which is undeniably a part of the Bible of the Church, was no longer read without bias. Many Christians saw only a Jewish God of revenge and hate at work in it who rigidly kept watch over obedience to his strict law whereas the New Testament proclaimed the Good News about the God of forgiveness and love who gave Christians a life of freedom from the law. Among Christians these and other antitheses coalesced into a disastrous attitude towards Judaism.

In the preaching of the Church the view gained acceptance that she is the new and true Israel whereas the Jewish people lost their relevance in salvation history, having ceded it to the Church. God revoked his covenant with the People of Israel. Judaism squandered its great inheritance and the Church came into this inheritance. The Jews had to be baptized and come into the Church. Many examples can be found throughout the centuries right up to the present, which document this theology of disinheritance.

## **B. Stages in History**

7. This religiously based Anti-Semitism, which arose during the period when the Church, as a new religious community, was disengaging herself from Judaism and when the New Testament Scriptures were being composed, subsequently grew stronger. It was prompted by the fact that the Jewish religion still attracted members of Christian congregations. This appeal constantly produced proselytes until the high Middle Ages. This competition for converts intensified the controversy. From the second century on it led to a profusion of anti-Jewish treatises. The treatises - in part in the form of fictitious dialogues between Christians and Jews, Church and synagogue - renewed and expanded the anti-Jewish stereotypes up to the end of the Middle Ages. The destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, the seemingly final loss of a home in Israel, and the dispersion of the Jews in exile were also interpreted by Christians as God's punishment for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah.

8. After the final ban of all pagan and heretical cults by Emperor Theodosius I at the end of the fourth century tendencies arose in the Church to suppress Judaism as well by destroying synagogues and taking action to force conversion. It is true that the Christian emperors remained faithful to the toleration of Judaism as a "permitted religion". Simultaneously, however, they limited the rights of the Jews as citizens of the empire; for example, Jews were forbidden to hold office or build new synagogues. At the same time, Augustine was developing a theological justification for the existence of the Jews as the only non-Christian religious community: God spread the Jews throughout the whole world for the purpose of bearing witness to the truth of the Gospel through their Scriptures which they themselves did not understand. For this reason they must also not be killed, referring to Paul's promise (Rom 11:25-26), Augustine joined this admonition to the hope that all Jews would one day be saved.

9. In addition to the theological line of thought which in the end based the toleration of the Jews over and over again on the expectation of their eventual salvation in the sense of their conversion to the Gospel, the theology of rejection also continued to develop; it, too, believed it could invoke biblical traditions. Both lines of thought often appeared side by side in the same people. This affected the vacillating attitude of Church authorities throughout the centuries and is the explanation for frequently contradictory statements and conduct. The popes, the Church hierarchy and canon law, which was compiled and systematized in the high Middle Ages, confirm the toleration of the Jews while issuing partially restrictive orders; the medieval emperors invariably kept to the Roman legal tradition as well. In contrast, kings, princes and the nobility as well as the parish clergy, monks and laity laid hands on the Jews again and again in times of change, especially in times of crisis.

10. In the process, areas and periods in which Christians and Jews lived together peacefully alternated with ones in which Jewish men and women were exposed to persecution, killing and expulsion. In the medieval world the people and the emerging empires were trying to find an identity which involved mistrusting larger groups of ethnic and especially religious minorities. The xenophobia observable in all societies was escalated with respect to the Jewish minority for economic reasons; these consisted in the exceptional position of the Jews in commerce, initially as international merchants, later as moneychangers and moneylenders, and finally as pawnbrokers and peddlers. Of more serious consequence were the Jewish way of life, conditioned by ritual regulations and considered strange, and the challenge of Christianity as a religion claiming absolute truth and validity, a challenge justified only by its presence.

11. During times of crisis, famine, war, epidemics and social tensions the need to find scapegoats was frequently turned against the weakest link in society, the Jewish minority. In such situations the arsenal of stereotypes found in anti-Jewish theology was activated. It was transformed into rabble-rousing speeches by popular preachers. They stirred the common people to persecute and kill Jews. As a rule, there were also voices, which supported the Jews. In many instances Christian men and women also provided assistance to the persecuted. But the secular and spiritual authorities were often not able or did not take the trouble to oppose the roused anger of the masses or provide effective protection for Jewish men, women and children. Ecclesiastical authorities often consoled themselves with the argument that God would not have permitted the disaster if he had not wanted it; the Jews had obviously been rejected by God.

Wherever the Jewish minority received documented protection, it often happened for utilitarian reasons since the Jews fulfilled important economic functions through their activities. If these advantages ceased to exist because Christians now performed the functions, for example as international merchants or financiers, then the protection proved to be fragile.

12. A first large wave of persecution took place in the seventh-century Spain of the Visigoths. Religious unity among the Christians had been achieved through the conversion of the Arians to Catholicism, and now baptism was also required of the Jews. The Church had forbidden forced conversion under Pope Gregory I (590-604). The Fourth Council of Toledo (633), however,

resolved that even those baptized under force may not become apostate again. This decree was later adopted by canon law and, since the thirteenth century, it automatically subjected all forced converts who relapsed to the Inquisition, even those baptized as children. Although theologians such as Thomas Aquinas repeatedly insisted upon the validity of parents' rights for Jews as well, the relevant canon was still applied until into the nineteenth century.

13. The negative image of Jews was embedded as an integrative component in popular piety just as it was in theology. Persecutions, even massacres of Jews could thus be passed off as an act willed by God. The West experienced the first large-scale carnage of Jews during the First Crusade. Popular preachers who had slipped away from ecclesiastical supervision incited the masses that preceded the actual army of crusaders and whose members were recruited mainly from the lower classes; they appealed to the crowds to avenge Christ's blood on God's enemies (cf. Mt 23:35-36). Admittedly, it was also a matter of appropriating the wealth of the Jewish minority to obtain the missing means for the poor crusaders. Although the bishops as a rule tried to protect the Jews and Christian citizens interceded for them in several places, thousands of men and women, old people and children were killed by the hordes in 1096. Their property was plundered and their synagogues were destroyed. Through his vigorous intervention, the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, who himself had previously espoused an Anti-Semitic theology in his sermons, was able to prevent further persecutions in the Rhineland during the Second Crusade.

Since the high Middle Ages malicious, popular legends, which had already arisen in late antiquity, have been used to an increasing degree to keep the hostility towards the Jews alive and to fan its flames. When a plague epidemic spread through all of Europe around the middle of the fourteenth century, the Jews were accused of seeking to eradicate Christendom in a comprehensive conspiracy by poisoning the waters and wells. In spite of papal protest, the majority of the Jewish communities still existing in Germany at that time were annihilated.

14. Accusations that the Talmud and other Jewish literature insulted Christ and the Virgin Mary culminated in the condemnation and burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242. This incident was repeated several times up to the end of the Middle Ages. Since the hoped-for conversion of the Jews failed to take place, the inclination to get rid of them completely grew. The Jews were expelled from England and Apulia already in 1290, and by 1395 they had been expelled in several waves from France. The expulsion of the Jews from Spain had a particularly traumatic effect. The edict of Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile from March 31, 1492 ended a culturally rich period of Christian-Jewish co-existence, which had nevertheless not been free of escalating local persecutions. The Jewish community of Spain had been weakened through forced baptisms and local massacres, but also through voluntary conversions to Christianity. In order to put an end to the contact of the New Christians (conversos), who originally belonged to Judaism, with the remaining Jewish congregations, all Jews of all ages were banished from the kingdom of Spain. Christians were forbidden to take the exiles in. Thus tens of thousands had to leave their ancestral Spanish home. The descriptions of the fate of the Jewish exiles rank as some of the most shattering texts of medieval Hebrew literature.

15. In the modern age no definitive improvement occurred in the relationship with the Jews. The churches of the Reformation adopted the traditional Anti-Semitic views as well and kept them up. In many places the Jewish minority had to live in ghettos isolated from the Christians and wear clothes typical of them. Nowhere did they have the same rights as the non-Jewish citizens. From the sixteenth century on, the number of Jews increased in Eastern Europe and was vested with rights of autonomous self-government. The Jews formed an endangered middle class between the aristocracy of Poland/Lithuania and the dependent Christian population. When a rebellion of the Cossack militia under Bogdan Chmelnitzki broke out in the Ukraine in 1648, the wrath of the Orthodox population was not just directed at the Catholic aristocracy of Poland, but above all at the Jews residing there. Many Jewish communities were destroyed and the number of slain Jews was huge. The memory of these events had far-reaching consequences for the piety of the Jews in

middle and Eastern Europe where they kept their traditional way of living in their own districts or towns for a long time.

With the advent of the Enlightenment in Western Europe an effort was made to improve the legal status of Jews. To an increasing degree, civil rights were granted to the Jews, with variations from state to state. Most of the Jews had given up the isolated existence of the ghettos. They intensified their participation in the overall economic life. This, however, exposed them at once to the Anti-Semitic moods and deeds, which were triggered by the economic crises of the nineteenth century. Religious prejudice was on the decline, but could always be called back into play. Economic and social reasons for being hostile towards the Jews of Europe became more determinant.

### C. The Path into the Shoah

16. A new form of Anti-Semitism arose in the nineteenth century with the hitherto unknown assertion that the Jews belonged to an inferior race. The ideologically-charged racial theory joined forces with the economic, political and cultural accusations against the Jews. One accused them of wielding a harmful and dangerous influence: they infiltrated the respective nations with foreign influences, dissolved the social order and exploited the citizens. Outside the Church in particular, the Anti-Semitism of the modern age triggered malicious discrimination and persecution. But it was so successful because it reckoned with the Anti-Semitic attitude of Christians for its purposes and knew how to make use of it.

17. A terrible concoction of racist, social, economic, political and religious Anti-Semitism was the precondition for the worst persecution of Jews of all times. Racist Anti-Semitism became the program of National Socialism. Hitler himself had already openly and aggressively advocated this Anti-Semitism before his political ascent. His Anti-Semitism was rooted in a pseudo-mystical nationalism, made use of pseudo-scientific arguments from anthropology and biology, and resorted to popular varieties of social Darwinism. Hitler declared that Jews were non-Aryans and therefore members of an inferior race. As early as 1919 he spoke of an "Anti-Semitism of reason." The National Socialist Anti-Semitism operated with a cold, callous pseudo-intellectualism in order to liquidate its victims on a massive scale.

When Hitler became German chancellor in 1933, a time of terror began for the Jews in Germany. Many of them lost their positions; Jewish stores were boycotted; books by Jewish authors were publicly burned; marriages between "Aryans" and Jews were forbidden. Gradually the Jews lost all their rights. Starting in 1938 they were forced to bear the name "Israel" or "Sarah". In the pogrom night of the 9th to the 10th of November, 1938, the synagogues in the entire German Reich were set afire and demolished. Stores and residences were plundered. About thirty thousand Jews were locked up in concentration camps and about one hundred were murdered.

At the Wannsee conference in Berlin on January 20, 1942 prominent Nazis and ministry officials discussed the implementation and coordination of the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," i.e. of the systematic and complete annihilation of European Judaism. The conference methodically planned the unimaginable catastrophe, which we, following the Jews, call the "Shoah". All the important decisions about, measures for and actions of this persecution and extermination originated in Germany. About six million Jewish men, women and children lost their lives in it. The human dignity of those who managed to survive was wounded beyond cure.

18. The murderous rage of the National Socialists also struck other groups and peoples. In Germany alone tens of thousands of handicapped and mentally ill fell victim to secret campaigns of killing ordained by the state. After the military conflicts of the Second World War began, persecutorial and annihilative measures were aimed at the intelligentsia of the Polish people and representatives of the Polish Church. Among the other victims of Nazi tyranny, the Sinti and Romany were fellow-sufferers with the Jewish people in a special way. This minority, which to a

large extent belongs to the Catholic Church and has witnessed a long history of persecution, has several hundred thousand genocide victims to mourn.

19. The National Socialists did immeasurable harm to many groups and peoples in Europe. The fact that they pursued the systematic annihilation of the Jews of Europe with inconceivable savagery forces us to ask time and again why the Shoah reached such a scale of terror and horror.

20. During the years of the Shoah the Church did not intercede on behalf of the Jews in a way Christian faith would have required. It could not have been unclear to any Christian at the time that Anti-Semitism is impermissible in moral terms and untenable in Christian terms. Popes Pius XI and Pius XII as well as bishops distanced themselves publicly from totalitarian National Socialism and declared that racism is incompatible with the foundations of Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> But with regard to the pogrom of November 1938 there were no official protests on the part of the German bishops. And during the Shoah no unequivocal, public, clear condemnation of this mass murder of the Jewish people ensued.

Pius XII as well as individual Christians supported the cause of the Jews so that more of them could be saved. Convents and monasteries hid Jewish men, women and children, often at great risk to themselves. Priests issued Jews fictitious baptismal certificates with which they could save themselves. But on the whole, the help provided by Christians and the protests issued by the official Church were too weak. There are many reasons for this failure. At that time the not unjustified concern played a role that the acts of cruelty of the National Socialists against the Jewish people would get even worse if there were a public defense of the Jews. People also thought they could not easily accept responsibility for the reprisals against the Church and individual Christians which were certainly to be expected if there were loud protest. Not least of all, in this situation the lengthy past history of Christian Anti-Semitism had an effect. The numerous prejudices against the Jews, which had been circulated in preaching and teaching, could hardly have permitted the emergence of a sense of solidarity with the persecuted Jewish minority. Thus Jewish men, women and children were exterminated without any successful and effective resistance on the part of the Church as a whole.

## II. The Question of the Church's Complicity and Guilt

21. Recalling the history of the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people makes clear "how negative the net result of the relations between Jews and Christians has been over two thousand years."<sup>3</sup> Just registering the fact of the historical burden is not enough. Over and above that, Christians and the Church should "for their part ... be able to see to what extent the responsibility is theirs."<sup>4</sup> This has not yet happened as explicitly as necessary since Christians have only become more aware of their responsibility in a hesitating and conflict-ridden process of reflection. The Church, knowing that she is "in need of purification" and that she must therefore follow "the path of penance and renewal,"<sup>5</sup> has taken first steps towards acknowledging her responsibility.

### A. The Condemnation of Anti-Semitism by the Church

22. The historical context of the Shoah induced the Second Vatican Council to formulate its Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, article 4. The Council declaration changed the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people in a decisive way. Concerning the hostility, discrimination and violence directed at the Jewish people and Judaism it stated: "Remembering, then, her common heritage with the Jews and moved not by any political consideration, but solely by the religious motivation of Christian charity, she deploras all hatreds, persecutions, displays of Anti-Semitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews."<sup>6</sup> The rejection of Anti-Semitism by the Council has been confirmed and



expressed more precisely in several post-conciliar statements of the Apostolic See, numerous bishops, and bishops' conferences.

23. In its guidelines the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has shown how to account for the rejection of Anti-Semitism by the Council in practice. In the process it has denounced all forms of Anti-Semitism and discrimination as being opposed to the spirit of Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Anti-Semitism is "always in the process of reappearing under different guises."<sup>8</sup> Like every other form of racism it is "a sin against God and humanity."<sup>9</sup> In the treaty with the State of Israel from December 30, 1993, the Apostolic See repeated "its condemnation of hate, persecution and every other manifestation of Anti-Semitism directed at the Jewish people or individual Jews anywhere, at any time and by any person."<sup>10</sup> The Church thus counters the old and new forms of hostility towards and violence against the Jewish people with a clear and unambiguous vote of condemnation.

#### **B. The Challenge and Question for the Church**

24. It must be examined whether the clear and often repeated condemnation of Anti-Semitism defies the very history of the Church and her faithful. To be more precise: Does a share of the responsibility for the Shoah fall upon the Church because of her prior contribution to a climate which had been indifferent or even hostile to the Jewish people and Judaism and had prepared a ground for the Nazi persecution and extermination of the Jews in our century? This is both a necessary and painful question. Discussing it calls for an alert awareness of historical guilt and a well-developed sense for truthfulness.

25. The Church is aware "that certain traditions in Catholic thinking, Catholic doctrine, preaching, and the practice of the faith during the period of the Church Fathers and the Middle Ages contributed to the emergence of Anti-Semitism in Western society."<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II stated that, in the history of the relationship between the Church and the Jews, the injustice inflicted upon the Jews in Europe for centuries "had quite often been written into the thought patterns and moral structures."<sup>12</sup> This statement has far-reaching consequences. The injustice written into the "thought patterns" has been called a "teaching of contempt"<sup>13</sup> regarding the Jewish people and Judaism. In the course of a long history, anti-Jewish motifs, prejudiced ways of thinking as well as unjustified accusations have found their way into the theological, liturgical, catechetical and artistic tradition of the Church. They constituted a constant in theology and became common Christian property. The unfriendly way of thinking and speaking found expression in moral conduct and eventually was incorporated into the "moral structures".

26. We must indeed acknowledge: In the teaching practice of theology and in the living practice of the Church of many centuries, an injustice is present which has been incorporated into thought patterns and moral structures. It was one element on the way to the Shoah. On the other hand it would be "unfair and untrue to blame Christianity for this unspeakable crime."<sup>14</sup> Christendom did not cause the Shoah and did not set it in motion. All the important decisions, measures and actions, which led to, the extermination of Jewish men, women and children in Europe originated with the National Socialists in Germany. Although those people who conceived, planned, organized and carried it out were for the most part baptized and had experienced a Christian upbringing, they denied the Gospel with their thinking and action in a fundamental and shocking way and trampled it underfoot. Nevertheless, their conduct raises the grave question of why the Church and her faithful were unable to keep the perpetrators from their criminal ways.

#### **C. Confession**

27. The examination of conscience, in particular by the German Church, attests a growing understanding of the distressing circumstances of that period. On the 50th anniversary of the

liberation of Auschwitz, January 27, 1995, the German bishops stated: An anti-Jewish attitude, also in the ecclesiastical sphere, "contributed to Christians not offering the necessary resistance to racist Anti-Semitism in the years of the Third Reich. In many cases there was failure and guilt among Catholics. Not just a few let themselves be won over by the ideology of National Socialism, and they remained indifferent when crimes were committed against Jewish property and life. Others encouraged the crimes or even became criminals themselves. It is not known how many were shocked by the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and yet did not find the strength to protest openly. Those who did help to the point of risking their own lives were often left on their own. It troubles us deeply today that there were only individual initiatives on behalf of persecuted Jews and that there was no public, explicit protest even during the pogroms of November 1938 when hundreds of synagogues were burned and devastated, cemeteries desecrated, thousands of Jewish stores demolished, countless residences of Jewish families damaged and plundered, and people derided, maltreated and even murdered. Looking back at the events of November 1938 and at the twelve-year tyranny of the National Socialists brings us face to face with the heavy burden of history. It reminds us 'that the Church, which we profess to be holy and honor as a mystery, is also a sinful Church and in need of repentance' (Message of the German bishops on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the November pogroms of 1938).

There is also an ecclesiastical dimension to the failure and guilt of that period. We recall this by citing the testimony of the general synod of the dioceses in the Federal Republic of Germany: 'We are the country whose recent political history was blackened by the attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in a systematic way. And during the period of National Socialism we were, when seen as a whole and in spite of the exemplary conduct of individual persons and groups, undeniably a church community that went on living with its back turned to the fate of this persecuted Jewish people, a community that let its perspective be too strongly determined by the threat to its own institutions, and one that remained silent about the crimes committed against the Jews and Judaism.... The practical integrity of our desire for renewal also depends on the admission of this guilt and on our willingness to learn from our country's and also our Church's history of guilt' (Resolution 'Our Hope,' November 22, 1975). We ask the Jewish people to hear this message of repentance and desire for renewal."<sup>15</sup>

28. The message of the German bishops confesses failure and guilt. The bishops are speaking in the awareness that the attempt to exterminate European Jews in a systematic way originated in their country. For the examination of conscience by both the Church as a whole and the Church in the countries occupied by and at war with Nazi-Germany, the perspective is different. Here, for example, one can point to public episcopal protest after the November pogroms of 1938. Or one should call to mind the suppression of the hierarchy after the occupation of a country, as in Poland. Recalling the assistance given by Christian men and women, the representatives of the Orthodox Church, or the Apostolic See to the Jewish victims also identifies many names and exemplary actions. And yet there is manifold cause for the Church as a whole to examine her conscience. The words of the apostle Paul already verify this: "If one part suffers, all the parts [of the one body] suffer with it" (1 Cor 12:26). At the same time an examination of conscience has validity in view of the complexity of the connections between complicity and guilt on the path to the Shoah. Throughout the centuries there was hostility towards the Jews and Judaism among Christians and in the Church. It is an element in the history of the whole Church.

29. In a proclamation and theology, which had lasted for centuries, there was no provision for the continuation of Judaism as a way of life and faith in God's plan of salvation. It was an enigma. The existence of Jews as Jews seemed abnormal. What appeared to be obsolete in Christian thinking was not given proper attention in situations of peril. The Christian perception of the actual situation of the Jewish minority was impaired when the danger became life threatening. A longstanding theology and proclamation had soothed the consciences and weakened the ability to show solidarity and resistance when the National Socialist Anti-Semitism surfaced in Germany and

Europe with its brutality and criminal energy. Along with their bishops, many Christian men and women were so biased in their view that God's covenant with Israel had been revoked and that the contemporary existence of the Jewish people was an anachronism that they did not have the necessary clear-sightedness to see the evil of National Socialism's Anti-Semitic persecution and also did not stand in its way. Thus the manifold guilt among Christians and in the Church came about: the guilt for not having done what is good as well as the guilt for having done evil, the guilt for silence and repressing the facts; the guilt for denial and for having failed to give assistance, as well as the guilt for having been absent where protest, help and protection were necessary and possible.

30. The Church as a whole recognizes a connection between the longstanding "teaching of contempt" regarding the Judaism and the brutal Anti-Semitism in the modern age of the West. The history of failure and guilt with regard to the Jewish people is a part of her history. The Church regrets this. She feels shame and recognizes the necessity of repentance. In view of the failure of the Church and the faithful with respect to the Jewish people, we confess with the testimony of St. John: "If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make him [God] a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 Jn 1:10). The Church thus confesses that she bears a share of the responsibility for the Shoah and has placed herself under a burden of guilt with respect to the Jewish people and Judaism.<sup>16</sup>

### **III. Tasks for the Church Arising from the Memory of the Shoah**

31. Recalling the history of the relationship between the Church and the Jewish people has made us aware that there have always been "some who were disloyal to the Spirit of God in history."<sup>17</sup> The examination of conscience and reflection in the face of the Shoah are supported by the admonition of the Second Vatican Council: "Consequently, if, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in Church discipline, or even in the way that Church teaching has been formulated - to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself - these should be set right at the opportune moment and in the proper way."<sup>18</sup>

32. The following reflections stand in the service of the renewal or the duty to set things right recommended by the Council. With them we want to encourage the taking of the Bible seriously, which is held in common with Israel, and to submit hermeneutical instructions for those New Testament statements, which have many times been the source of Christian-Jewish controversy. The remarks reflect on the experience of the Shoah as an admonition for special caution and responsibility when we speak about God as savior and redeemer. Ecclesiological considerations ask about the implications of the continuing polarity of Church and Israel. Finally we will investigate the initiatives for an ethics of life, which seeks to be attentive to the voice of the million fold victims of the Shoah.

#### **A. Taking the Biblical Message and the Historical Facts Seriously**

33. A renewal of the relationship between Jews and Christians in the shadow of the Shoah requires that the Church treat her Holy Scriptures with more sensitivity. The Church must open herself in earnest to the insight that primitive Christianity as a whole had to rely on the Holy Scriptures of Judaism to be able to understand and convey the significance of Jesus of Nazareth. In primitive Christianity there was no "Old" Testament in the sense of a second-rate, past or obsolete source of revelation. On the contrary, the Holy Scriptures of the Jews were enlisted within the context of their Jewish milieu. Nowhere in the New Testament does it state that the Bible of the Jews had ceased to be the holy book of the Jews because of this enlistment in early Christianity. There is no primitive Christian splitting of the two Testaments. It was not possible for early Christianity to recognize the significance of Jesus apart from the basic beliefs of the Jewish Bible. The persuasive power of the early Christian scriptural evidence for the uniqueness of Jesus depended on Israel's Bible. The New Testament interpretation of the life and fate of Jesus was

done in the light of Judaism's Holy Scriptures.

34. The use of the Jewish Bible by the oldest form of Christendom is the precondition for the God of Jesus and the God of Israel, the God of Christians and the God of Jews being one and the same God. The disastrous differences and alternatives which were later asserted in the proclamation of the Church - and not seldomly so - did not exist. The Jew Jesus of Nazareth was interested in nothing other than the truth of Israel's faith in God. He called upon his contemporaries to recognize this truth. Neither that which Jesus wanted nor that which primitive Christianity ultimately proclaimed throughout the world focused on a new religious principle next to or opposed to that of Judaism. For Jesus the disastrous drifting apart of Christianity and Judaism was also not preconditioned by the controversy and separation which resulted from acknowledging him (Mt 10:16-39; 24:9-14, et al.) since these conflicts took place in the inner-Jewish context. For primitive Christianity as well, faith in Christ lay within the interpretational possibilities of the Jewish Bible. Here the Jewish Bible is not downgraded to a document, which is merely a record of the prehistory of Christianity.

35. Above all, early Christianity developed its faith that Jesus had been raised from the dead by consistently transferring titles to Jesus, which the Jewish tradition had held ready for the judge or redeemer at the end of time. According to Jewish thought those final days had to have dawned with his having been raised from the dead. These titles were above all the following: Son of Man, Lord, Christ-Messiah, Son of David and Son of God. Each of these titles had its own special place in Jewish tradition. None of these titles could be expressed or understood without this Jewish context. For this reason, however, the development of the oldest Christology of primitive Christianity depends on Judaism. And the christological additions of the later centuries have their justification by their not contradicting those first christological statements, which are completely indebted to the Jewish tradition. This Jewish beginning belongs to the foundation of every Christology.

36. The Church must again take on the challenge that the writings of the New Testament contain statements (cf. 1 Thes 2:14-16; Mt 27:24-25 or Jn 8:43-44), which have sanctioned Anti-Semitism and seem to be able to do this as well.

When we deal with these passages it does not suffice to cite other passages from Paul (cf. Rom 11:25-27), Matthew (cf. Mt 23:2-3) or John (cf. Jn 4:22), which present a more positive picture of the Jews. Such positive proofs do not expunge those other negative statements from the normative documents of the Church. Neither can the statements be dismissed by pointing out that, to a large extent, primitive Christianity was a child of its times and had only shared the common resentment of the pagan world against the Jews. It is of little help to mention that the Anti-Semitic statements of the New Testament went no further than the hostile pronouncements which Jewish groups at the time of primitive Christianity and even Jesus of Nazareth himself (cf. Lk 7:31-35 or Lk 11:29-32) formulated against their Jewish contemporaries. Christianity has transmitted these Anti-Semitic statements of the New Testament through history up into the present and has often furnished them with a dangerous explosive force in other historical contexts.

Instead of all this, the decisive reason for all New Testament hostility to the Jews demands new recognition. It is the fact that the first disciples of Jesus already failed to convince the rest of the Jews that Jesus had been raised and is the Messiah. With the gradual separation of the Church from Israel in the New Testament at the end of the primitive Christian period the disappointment over the Jews having retained their own traditions became apparent.<sup>19</sup> It found its expression in polemical and aggressive statements which are not valid under any circumstances for all times. The general failure of the mission to the Jews by the "Church from the peoples" up to the present time remains a basic experience of the Church, which demands a new theological interpretation.

37. Pejorative ways of speaking about Jewish "law" have established themselves in Christian theology. They do not convey what early Judaism understood by the "commandments and prohibitions of the Torah." Within Christian theology the term "law" is often affixed to questions, which arose in the age of the Reformation and which, one tried to project back into Jesus' relationship with his Jewish surroundings. The issue here is the question of justification by "faith" or "works". The "work" is assigned to a petty and portentous piety which one depicts as typically Jewish. In reality, however, that comprehensive notion of "Torah" was already evolving in early Judaism, which later flourished in the Talmudic period. Beyond the pluralism of early Judaism, the Torah is by no means a collection of casuistically stylized rules and prohibitions, but instructions for a successful life, which have their equivalent in the order of creation itself (cf. Sir 24:22-31). For the oldest layers of the Jesus-tradition it cannot be demonstrated that the Torah and the accompanying halakhah were called into question in a fundamental way. On the contrary, obedience to the commandments and prohibitions of the Torah initially defined Palestinian Jewish Christianity. An actual discussion of the relevance of the law to salvation is missing in the Jesus traditions of the synoptic gospels. The gospel of Matthew, as well as Q which precedes it, expressly maintains (Mt 5:17, cf. Lk 16:17) that the Torah and halakhah are still in force. Only within the framework of the gradually unfolding mission to the Gentiles and with reference to the authority of Jesus were parts of the law annulled, without, however, questioning the importance of the "commandments" for salvation (cf. in addition Mk 10:17-19).

38. How Jesus' death on the cross came about and who should be held responsible for it remain urgent questions. For centuries Christians have attributed the blame for Jesus' death to the Jews in a sweeping fashion. For this reason the Jews were held to be "Godkillers",<sup>20</sup> and because of this accusation they were mercilessly persecuted time and again in the course of history. For theological and ethical reasons it has never been possible to justify this accusation. Upon closer examination of the New Testament Scriptures we must say that it is also untenable on historical grounds. The connection established by the evangelist Mark (Mk 3:6) between the early deeds of Jesus in Galilee and his death in Jerusalem has no historical basis. The evangelist, who was writing from the perspective of the later, early Christian controversy with the Pharisees, placed this connection at the beginning of Jesus' preaching. It is striking that the same evangelist does not mention the Pharisees in the account of the passion.<sup>21</sup>

The conflict in which Jesus died is by no means the climax of a long dispute between Jesus and the Judaism of his time. Nor is it the result of an argument about Jewish law. The condemnation of Jesus probably occurred because of a prophetic, symbolic action against the Temple in Jerusalem, which is still discernible in the text about the cleansing of the Temple (Mk 11:15-17). At that time the Temple was the site of the political co-operation between the Roman force of occupation and the Sadducean priesthood, which supplied the Jewish leadership. Whoever attacked the Temple and relativized it through a prophecy (cf. Mk 14:58) was revolting against the temple-state system in the province of Judea, a system which had been installed and legitimized by the Romans. Jesus' utterance against the Temple (Mk 14:58) constituted rebellion ("perduellio") according to Roman law. According to Jewish law the same prophecy corresponded to the offense of blasphemy, which stood under the threat of death (cf. Jer 26:1-19). According to what we know today, the condemnation of Jesus to death on the cross took place in a proper trial and according to the stipulations of a Roman (and Jewish) capital jurisdiction, which acted in a juridically accurate manner. Neither at that time nor today do these historical findings permit an allocation of guilt to the Jews.

39. It is indisputable that here is a basic stock in Christian theology and eschatology, in ethics and liturgy, which comes from the Jewish tradition. One must, however, be skeptical whether the relationship between Jews and Christians can be put right simply by searching for what they theologically hold in common since this common ground has always been there. It has almost never protected the Jews from being treated with contempt by the Christians. Not least of all, the

future relationship between Christians and Jews will depend on whether Christians acknowledge the theological traditions of Judaism in their autonomy and their particular theological dignity, i.e. whether they, following in the footsteps of the Bible (cf. Rom 11:17-24), relinquish the absolute claim of Christianity with respect to Judaism.

#### **B. The Shoah and Speech about God the Redeemer**

40. Reflecting on the Shoah raises questions, which do not even stop at faith in God and speech about God. The Shoah dragged the very people into extermination who were the intended recipients of God's election and promise: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the communities of the earth shall find blessing in you" (Gn 12:2-3); and: "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, offspring of Abraham my friend - you whom I have taken from the ends of the earth and summoned from its far-off places, you whom I have called my servant, whom I have chosen and will not cast off - fear not, I am with you; be not dismayed; I am your God" (Is 41:8-10).

41. The suffering of the innocent, of the tried and true, and especially of children has always driven people to ask the desperate question of why, to what purpose. The evil committed in the Shoah and the suffering endured there seem to be to an increasing degree proof for the absence, silence or non-existence of God. Faith cannot ignore this evil and suffering. Theology as speech about God cannot remain untouched by the Shoah.

42. The Jewish people have often wrestled with their God in the face of suffering, and in times of decline they have asked: "Whom are we to depend on other than our Father in heaven?" (Sota IX, 14-15). Jewish victims in the death camps also questioned in this way, held on to their God, and went to their deaths with the profession "Hear, O Israel" or the melody "I believe." The faith of others was destroyed. For those who lost their faith, despair and anger could lead to their cursing God. But it also occurred that victims who had been alienated from their religious tradition found their way back to faith in God in the camps of the Shoah. Many of the victims - numbed and weakened by the horrible experiences - were incapable of an explicit response, whether of faith or of negation.

Later attempts to insert the Shoah into the thousand-year-old history of suffering of the Jewish people did not remain without contradiction. Some have tried to respond to the experience of the Shoah with biblical and post-biblical testimonies of faith and to speak of the "hidden face" of God (cf. Is 54:8). Others have emphasized the uniqueness and incomparability of the Shoah; here discourse about a "new Sinai" as a revelation of the death of God is encountered. The reproach has been voiced that God's creation has turned out badly for him or that he could or would no longer interfere in the course of history once it started. Or God has been called to account with other bitter complaint. This has been countered with the objection that only the human person who has done the evil needs to account for it. On the contrary, the Shoah has revealed the necessity of believing in God and of not giving up the hope for salvation and redemption. One has spoken of a "commanding voice from Auschwitz" which admonishes the Jewish people to be faithful to their God in order to prevent a posthumous victory of National Socialism. In objection to this it has been said that, according to Jewish tradition, one must include the belief that God has mercy on those murdered after their death and rewards their faithfulness in the resurrection with everlasting life. Finally there is a lamentation, which presents itself as a document from the last hours of resistance in the Warsaw ghetto; the one praying the text refuses to let go of God no matter what has befallen him in terms of evil, pain and absurdity. He attests to a love of God, which holds on to God in spite of all that has discouraged this love: "You have done everything to keep me from believing in you. In case you think you will succeed in diverting me from my path, I say to you, my God and God of my fathers: You will not succeed." People who had suffered from the absence of love affirmed the justice and love of God - in prayer.

43. From the perspective of Auschwitz it can become clear anew: Prayer is the search for the face of God (cf. Ps 27:8,10; 42; 63:2-4), which is hidden in the world. It is precisely God's withdrawnness that lets us ask for him, lament before him and seek him. Especially in his suffering and death Jesus searched for his father in this way with the words of the psalm: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34), and in this he proved himself to be the "Son of God" (Mk 15:39).

44. Prayerful lament facing God shows a way to speak about God, which bears in mind the suffering of the people and of the Shoah. God cannot be reduced to orderly formulae. He cannot be enclosed in unassailable definitions. He is and remains mystery, about whom the prophet says: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord" (Is 55:8). God's mystery turns into dark incomprehensibility in the face of suffering. This incomprehensibility makes a counterprayer out of the prayer from the Warsaw ghetto: "I cannot praise you for the deeds you tolerate. But I bless and praise you for your awful greatness which must be powerful if even that which is happening now does not impress you.... Stop proving your greatness by striking the unfortunate." The incomprehensibility of suffering is a part of the incomprehensibility of God. The question disquiets many hearts: Where was God in Auschwitz? No one has the authority to forbid the question. Who would have the strength to answer it? The question and the complaint inherent in it also have their place in theology. In view of the unfathomable history of suffering in the Shoah theological discourse neither silences the questions nor causes them disappear.

45. Self-assured and arrogant speech about God does not know about the ferocity of the challenge because of the ills, suffering and evil in the world. Such speech has not yet experienced the doubt caused by the Shoah. It is not a demonstration of the strength of theology and its discourse about God when one observes so little of humanity's history of suffering in it. The right way to speak about God contains something of a cry for the rescue of the victims and those suffering unjustly. It knows the language of doubt and danger. It knows about the right to lament and cry out. The mysticism of suffering from God is not foreign to it. It still hears the cry of Jesus on the cross and is close to the cry of this godforsaken one who will not let go of his God. Right speech about God is not a detached doctrine about God. Since it is speech from the heart it expresses the longing of one who has experienced darkness, misfortune and hostility and who is on the lookout for God as savior and shepherd (cf. the context of psalms 22, 23 and 24). And yet it is an open question whether humans also experience God as shepherd of their ways. This has often been forgotten in the history of speech about God. The confrontation with the Shoah makes us aware of what has been suppressed many times.

46. Speech about God as savior and redeemer as well as the understanding of salvation have fallen under the shadow of the Shoah. The Shoah darkens the transparency of history and destroys any naïve optimism with respect to the meaning of history. It masks that history stands under the rule of God. Above all it asks about the reality of redemption which the faith of the Church connects with Jesus Christ.

47. In its changing history Israel does indeed experience various kinds of deliverance by God. In the Bible, especially in times of distress, it extols the liberation from the slavery of Egypt and rescue in the face of death (Ex 1-15). Its teachers and prophets recall this pivotal experience of deliverance in situations of danger, affliction, apostasy or exile to call upon God, to admonish or console the people, or to strengthen them in the hope for God's renewed assistance (cf. Am 9; Ez 20; Is 43, 51-52 and passim). In the revelation of his name to Moses as "I shall be there as who I am, shall I be there with you" (cf. Ex 3:14) God gave the pledge: Just as he now desires to be there in the slavery of his people in a helpful way, so he will be "there" with them always anew, helping, saving, redeeming. It is God who then also leads Israel out of exile in Babylon (Is 48f; Jer 16 or Ez 34). According to the New Testament Jesus is actually "leader and savior" (Acts 5:31) who led people out of the reign of death to "free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life" (Heb 2:15). He is the leader in whom, according to the liturgy of the Easter

vigil, God himself leads the people through the waters of baptism, giving them a share in the "heritage of Israel."<sup>22</sup> In the biblical name of God as "savior" (Hb 3:18; Is 43:11; cf. Lk 1:47 and passim) a promise of salvation is contained. The promise not only refers to the redemption from sin, guilt and death, but also to the salvation and liberation from historical situations of human suffering.

48. But where the salvation promised in the Bible many times fails to happen, the promise appears to be revoked and taken back, and it seems that salvation has not yet occurred. The Shoah in particular radicalizes the serious Jewish objection to the Christian understanding of redemption. The objection states: "We are not been redeemed." It argues: Facing the reality of creation as it is, one cannot speak of a redeemed state of creation. History would have to take a different course and the world would have to look different if they were redeemed. Above all, the victims of the Shoah who lost their battle for their lives because the world deserted them testify: We are not really redeemed. When Jews say the world has not yet been reconciled, Christians do not need to contradict this.

The Shoah is a blow to faith, which cuts deeply. The Shoah is not the end of faith. The horror of the Shoah and the cry for redemption remain.

### C. The Church on a Common Pilgrimage with the Jewish People

49. Within the context of reflecting on the meaning of the Shoah, the Church has rediscovered her own bond with the Jewish people and has shown it in an increasingly clearer light. For the Second Vatican Council these ties belong to the essence of the Church; they become present in the act of self-reflection: "Sounding the depths of the mystery which is the Church, this sacred Council remembers the spiritual ties which link the people of the New Covenant to the stock of Abraham."<sup>23</sup> From this statement Pope John Paul II drew the conclusion: "For us the Jewish religion is not something 'exterior', but belongs in a certain way to the 'interior' of our religion."<sup>24</sup> There are therefore "unique connections between Christianity and Judaism: The two are 'connected on the level of their own identity' (John Paul II on March 6, 1982), and these connections 'are based on the plan of the God of the Covenant' (ibid.)."<sup>25</sup>

50. Theologians are discussing the question of whether the connection of the Church to Judaism must not be taken into consideration in the doctrine on the marks of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Following the instruction of the Letter to the Romans, ecclesiology will emphasize more emphatically the meaning of the Church as that which has "come to share in the rich root of the olive tree" (Rom 11:17). The root is Israel - to this day. The bond "which binds the Church to the Jews and Judaism"<sup>26</sup> is strong. Conscious of this bond the Church expresses the trust, which is rooted in faith "that the Jews 'continue to be loved by God' who has chosen them with an 'irrevocable calling'."<sup>27</sup> These statements have the abiding reality of the Jewish people in view. The papal phrase about the "people of God of the Old Covenant which has never been terminated by God" also refers to this.<sup>28</sup> "The Old Covenant has never been revoked."<sup>29</sup>

51. It must be impressed upon the faithful that the election of the Jewish people continues. The non-terminated state of the Old Covenant forbids us to understand the New Covenant, in which the Church stands, as if it invalidated or superseded the Old Covenant. In their efforts to develop the connection and the ordering of the non-terminated Old Covenant and the New Covenant from Scripture, some say that the New Covenant is none other than the "First" Covenant; it is the Covenant of God's compassion which he constantly renews and fills with new vitality and in which Israel and the Church each share in their own special way. Others stress the multitude of covenants in the Bible and focus more intensely on the diverse dimensions, for instance in the Sinai Covenant and in the New Covenant in Christ.



52. Just as one dismisses talk about the Old Covenant being obsolete, one must also reject an understanding according to which the Church replaces or disinherits Israel. The continuing polarity of Church and Israel denotes both closeness and dissimilarity. Their relationship is not to be understood on the model of two parallel paths to salvation.<sup>30</sup> This view would not illustrate the facts of the common origin, conflict-ridden split and abiding challenge. Between the Church and Judaism a tension-filled relationship prevails which, besides closeness, is characterized by separation and, besides approval, by questioning. Between the two there exists a "connection of community and non-community."<sup>31</sup> Their polarity calls to mind that the Church is a "seed and a beginning of that kingdom (God's kingdom) on earth"<sup>32</sup> and that she is still awaiting her final consummation.<sup>33</sup> The polarity of Church and Israel is a sign that the kingdom of God is still to come in its fullness and that the plan of God is unfinished.<sup>34</sup>

53. Church and Israel each follow the path to the completion of God's plan in their own identity. The same God calls them. The Church, like Israel, is a wandering people of God: brought ever anew onto the path through the deserts of time, always reaching out for the goal of the kingdom of God. Until the coming of this kingdom in fullness, the tension-filled polarity remains which the Church respects. She does not desire the suspension or dissolution of Judaism. The mission to the Jews by the "Church from the peoples" was a mistake. The Church affirms Israel's mission or calling.<sup>35</sup> She looks with admiration at the Jewish people's witness of faithfulness to their God. She recognizes the theological and spiritual dignity of Israel. When she describes herself with the biblical prerogatives of Israel (cf. 1 Pt 2:9 with Ex 19:6 and Is 43:20-21), she does this out of closeness to Israel. She does not wish to deprive the people of the never revoked covenant of their dignity. The respect of Israel's honor protects the Church from a self-conceit, which Paul warns about (Rom 11:18ff). In the imitation of Jesus, the Church knows she is with Israel before the face of God, prays to him, hopes for him, calls to him in her afflictions and laments before him. Being especially close to the Jewish people, she stands in solidarity with all people. "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."<sup>36</sup> In her remembrance she commends the dead to the mercy of God. In witnessing to life as well as in the symbols of salvation and the feasts of faith<sup>37</sup> she, like Israel, sanctifies the daily routine, time and life.

#### **D. The Call for an Ethics of Life**

54. The unprecedented crime of the Shoah touches the foundations of Christian ethics. It happened on a continent, which has been shaped by a long history of Christianity. The conscience of Christians and of the Church must react to the cries of those who were murdered and martyred in the Shoah. Burdened by the weight of historical guilt and mindful of the loss of moral credibility with the Jewish people, the Christian conscience reacts in the spirit of humility and willingness to repent.

55. The ethics which seeks to be attentive to the cries of the victims of the Shoah stands in the service of a culture of life. The people who had received the prohibition "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13, Dt 5:17) from God and passed it on to humanity were precisely the ones who had to experience the disregard and denial of this divine directive millions of times in the Shoah. Every believer who recalls the suffering of the Jewish people in this century is all the more clearly aware that respect for humans and their lives is a fundamental commandment of God. Hence the words from Pope John Paul II's encyclical "Evangelium vitae" can also be referred to the Shoah: The admonition of the Church "wants to be a clear and firm confirmation of the value of human life and its inviolability and at the same time a passionate appeal in God's name to each and every person: respect, defend, love life, each human life, and be of service to it!"<sup>38</sup>

56. The unjust character of the legal measures of the National Socialist state and the criminal

nature of their implementation were masked by a public language which did not call things by name, but reduced the human to the technical. The National Socialists had introduced a bogus language. They described what they planned to do with ersatz words. In this way they spoke about their crimes by making use of lies. They intended to keep the true nature of their deeds secret from the world and to lead their victims astray. They used a language of contempt. People of a culture of life speak a different language. Respect for humans, their lives and their dignity is expressed in a language, which corresponds to the dictate of truth and calls things, by name. Such a language is imperative for an ethics of life.

57. The scale of the extermination of the Shoah had become possible because indifference and apathy had prevented people and nations from standing by the victims in a more energetic and effective way than was the case, from defending these victims and their lives, and from saving them from the violent death, which was meant for them. Too few overcame the climate of indifference as well as the fear and cowardice. But those who, stimulated by Christian faith or some other impulse, proved to be supporters set an ethical standard. In general the persecuted were considered to be people who brought danger and from whom one should keep a distance. For those who supported them, however, they were brothers and sisters in need with whom one should stand in solidarity. The helpers put aside concern for themselves or their own to stand by the others and by strangers. They often paid for their solidarity with their own lives. In their fate "the other, second face of the Shoah" showed itself. According to Jewish understanding they were "Righteous People," living an ethics of responsibility for the other. Responsibility for the other distinguishes the culture of life: Out of indifference comes participation on behalf of the other. A climate of distance and competition gives way to closeness and solidarity. Fear is conquered by courage. The promotion of what is one's own goes hand in hand with the acceptance of the other. The acceptance of the other makes justice possible. Justice brings about peace (cf. Is 32:17).

58. Those who through their support provided a model of responsibility in the years of persecution and extermination have left a further ethical legacy behind: the cooperation between Christian and Jewish communities and their members. Areas of cooperation include the search for common ethical answers to the challenges presented by science, technology and the economy as well as the practice of social cooperation for human rights, justice and peace, and against poverty, hunger, disease and unemployment. The cooperation presupposes that biases towards the ethical tradition of the other are examined and overcome. Unfortunately, there are still sweeping comparisons to be found among Christians between rigidity and flexibility, the national and the universal, justice and love, law and gospel with which the Jewish ethos is disparaged. This disdain must not have a place among Christians.

59. Endeavors to achieve both common ethical reflections and practical solidarity can be based on a rich treasure of shared convictions: The cosmos is the creation of the One God. The human person is created as the image of God. Each human life is holy and inviolable. People are responsible for each other. The dignity of each person must be protected regardless of his or her origin, sex, religion, ability and peculiarities. The efforts to seek justice for all people are particularly attentive to the weak and vulnerable. The relations of people to each other in the family, in society, and among peoples and nations must be marked by mutual solidarity and by a willingness to seek peace. Oppression, expulsion of minorities and authoritarian regimes are excluded. The preservation of creation has been assigned to us humans as trustees. These convictions are found time and again in the written and oral Torah or in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, and they have been handed down in subsequent commentaries and traditions and reinforced by Jewish and Church authorities. At the same time they provide a stable basis for investigating epochally new challenges and for finding valid answers.

60. For the first time in human history humans themselves have made it uncertain whether there will be human tomorrow. The future of humans is threatened by their inability to find peace and by the potentiality for destruction they have in hand, by their interference in the ecological structure of

the earth, by the ambivalence of their scientific-technical possibilities, and by their inability to distribute the food and other goods of the earth in a just manner. The homo faber can become the agent who threatens life, not only through his actions, but also through his thinking and research. Human and social experiments can endanger the personal identity of human beings. The danger that humanity will self-destruct cannot be averted with technical-scientific means alone. Fundamental political decisions are necessary which have been shaped by ethical options of a culture of life. Jewish and Christian men and women have a source in their traditions for formulating problem-solving models and perspectives of hope for a world which only has a future beyond indifference and hopelessness. If they do this together, then the impact of their voice will be more credible and stronger in the world.

61. The ethics of life points to a universal responsibility and has a concrete image. It is unmistakably biblical. It brings the person into a relationship with God since the ethics of life means life under the commandment of God: "Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy" (Lv 19:2). By observing God's commandments human beings sanctify life and the world, which is God's creation. Jews and Christians stand under the obligation to walk on God's paths and make his name known before the world (Ex 9:16). Even though people know they can add nothing to God's holiness (cf. Neh 9:5), they see themselves called upon to make holy the divine name by observing God's commandments (cf. Lv 22:31-32, Ex 20:7, Dt 32:51, Is 29:23, and Mt 6:9, Lk 11:2). By hallowing God's name people are reaching out for the kingdom of God. There is a deep longing for the nearness and coming of God inherent in the sanctifying of God's name. The call for the coming of the kingdom of God is part of the prayer hallowing the divine name. The ethics of life has an advent-like, messianic perspective.

## Conclusion

"Magnified and sanctified be his great name

in the world which he has created according to his will.

May he establish his kingdom during your life and during your days,

and during the life of all the house of Israel,

even speedily and at a near time

and say ye, Amen" (Jewish Kaddish).

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done on earth as in heaven" (Lord's Prayer according to Mt 6:9-10).

1. The attempt will not be made to trace the history of Anti-Semitism in the Church in its entirety. The presentation, which refrains from citing documentary evidence, also does not strive to be a sober, emotionless analysis from the standpoint of historical research. Instead, it confronts the historical reality in a compassionate and involved way. For this reason one will encounter expressions of pain and lamentation.
2. Pius XI, Encyclical "Mit brennender Sorge," March 14, 1937, AAS 29 (1937): 145-167; Sacred Congregation for Seminaries and Universities, "Letter to all Rectors and Deans," April 13, 1938, La Documentation Catholique 39 (1938): 579-580; Pius XII, Encyclical "Summi Pontificatus," October 28, 1939, AAS 31 (1939): 481-509; idem, "Rundfunkbotschaft zu Weihnachten [Christmas Message on the Radio]," December 24, 1942, AAS 35 (1943): 9-24.
3. Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Hinweise für eine richtige Darstellung von Juden und Judentum in der Predigt und in der Katechese der katholischen Kirche [Instructions for a Correct Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Preaching and Catechese of the Catholic Church]," June 24, 1985, n. 25, La Documentation Catholique 82 (1985): 733-738, quote on p. 738.
4. Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, "Guidelines on Religious Relations with the Jews, Nostra aetate, n. 4," December 1, 1974, French text in AAS 67 (1975): 73-79, quote on pp. 74-75, English text issued by the Commission, published in Austin Flannery et al., eds., Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Study Edition (New York 1975), 743-749, quote on p. 745.
5. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution Lumen Gentium, n. 8.
6. Vatican II, Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions Nostra aetate, n. 4.
7. Cf. "Guidelines" (see note 4), French text on pp. 73-74, English text on p. 744.
8. Cf. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 8, 735.
9. John Paul II, "Address to the Leaders of the British Council for Christians and Jews," November 16, 1990, Insegnamenti XIII, 2 (1990): 1202-1203.
10. Treaty between the Holy See and the State of Israel from December 30, 1993, article 2.2
11. International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee (ILC) Committee between the Catholic Church and the Jews], "Communiqué of the 13th Annual Meeting in Prag," September 3-6, 1990, The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Information Service 75 (1990/IV): 176-177.
12. "Address to the Jewish community of Poland," June 9, 1991, n. 3, Insegnamenti XIV, 1 (1991): 1618.
13. J. Isaac, L'enseignement du mépris. Vérité historique et mythes théologiques (Paris 1962).
14. John Paul II, "Address to the Representatives of the Jewish Community of Austria," June 24, 1988, Insegnamenti XI, 2 (1988): 2124-2129, quote on p. 2126.
15. Press statement of the German Bishops' Conference from January 24, 1995.
16. The formulation "share of the responsibility and guilt" is meant to preserve the distinction and connection between a historical analysis and a moral statement. In the historical analysis the tradition of theological and ecclesiastical anti-Judaism appears as one element among many on the path to the Shoah. The concept of "shared responsibility" or "complicity" is supposed to make it clear that this element was neither the only nor the main factor in the development. If the contribution to a historical development is considered under the aspect of blameworthy behavior and thus in a confessional statement, then one often speaks of a "share of the guilt." But from a moral-theological perspective this is inaccurate and unsatisfactory. The integrity and purity of a confession is marred if, in the act of admitting one's guilt, one looks at others at the same time. Guilt before God cannot

be halved, it is indivisible. The subject stating his or her guilt makes a statement about himself or herself and not about others. There is therefore a historical "share of the responsibility" or "complicity" which is to be confessed in the act of confession itself as "guilt".

17. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 43.
18. Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, n. 6.
19. Cf. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 21, C, 737.
20. Cf. above text in n. 5.
21. Cf. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 19, 736.
22. *Missale Romanum*, "The Celebration of the Easter Vigil: Liturgy of the Word, Prayer after the Third Reading."
23. Vatican II, Declaration on the Relations of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra aetate*, n. 4.
24. John Paul II, "Address during the Visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome," April 13, 1986, n. 4, AAS 78 (1986): 1117-1123, quote on p. 1119.
25. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 2, 733.
26. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 8, 734.
27. John Paul II, "Address" (see note 24), 1119.
28. John Paul II, "Address to the Central Committee of the Jews in Germany," November 17, 1980, AAS 73 (1981): 78-82, quote on p. 80.
29. Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 121.
30. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 7, 734.
31. Franz Rosenzweig, *Briefe und Tagebücher, 1 (1900-1918) = Der Mensch und sein Werk*, Collected Works, 1 (Haag 1979), 137.
32. Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, n. 5.
33. "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 8, 735.
34. Cf. Committee of the French Bishops' Conference for the Relations to Judaism, Declaration: "The Attitude of Christians towards Judaism: Pastoral Recommendations," April 16, 1973, n. VII, b, *La Documentation Catholique* 70 (1973): 419-422, quote on p. 422.
35. John Paul II, "Address to the Representatives of the Jewish Communities of Poland," June 14, 1987, *Insegnamenti* X,2 (1987): 2221-2222.
36. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.
37. The Vatican Commission has expressly gone into the importance of the liturgy for the renewal of the Church's relationship with the Jews and Judaism in her "Guidelines" (see note 4), French text on pp. 75-76, English text on pp. 745-746, and in her "Hinweise" [Instructions] (see note 3), n. 23-24, 737. The recommendations made there have not yet received the attention they deserve.
38. John Paul II, Encyclical "Evangelium vitae", March 25, 1995, No. 5.

Translated from the German by Martha M. Matesich.